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# Truth to Nature: Pre-Raphaelite Dress in Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture

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TRUTH TO NATURE: PRE-RAPHAELITE DRESS IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY VISUAL  
CULTURE

by

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A major research project  
presented to Ryerson University  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
in the Program of  
Fashion

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2012

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## **Abstract**

The Pre-Raphaelites were a group of artists in mid-nineteenth century England who disliked popular art, design, and fashion. They devised an oppositional, artistic type of dress. This major research project (MRP) endeavours to define, contextualize, and interpret the special kind of dress depicted in Pre-Raphaelite paintings and worn by women in the Pre-Raphaelite circle. Qualitative, interdisciplinary historical methods were used in my research method, and visual media (both primary and secondary sources) were used throughout the project. Outcomes include a new analysis of Pre-Raphaelite dress and its formal qualities along with a socio-cultural analysis of why the Pre-Raphaelites chose to dress in an eclectic way. The paintings reveal the diverse sources the Pre-Raphaelites used to create original garments in their illustrated works. The original garments the Pre-Raphaelites wore influenced other artistic, dress, and design reform movements such as the Aesthetic Dress movement and the Arts and Craft movement.

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## **Introduction: Truth to Nature**

Pre-Raphaelite dress is a specific type of clothing associated with the Victorian artistic group the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB). The PRB was a group of artists formed in 1848. The founding members, John Everett Millais, William Holman Hunt, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti eventually recruited other less influential members, Thomas Woolner, James Collinson, George Fredric Stephens, and William Rossetti. A discerning feature of the PRB was their aim to paint “truth from nature.” Their pictorial style depicted people and objects seen in clear light while rendering a spiritual or moral message. The group named themselves the PRB in protest against the aesthetic principles that dominated European art after the Italian master Raphael (1483-1520). They positioned themselves against his influence, which was characterised by exaggeration of contorted body positions, and the idealization of natural forms. Similarly, they scorned the teachings of the Royal Academy, despising both the teaching methods and artistic techniques characterized by idealism and exaggeration. The subjects of their works often referenced the past and featured medieval, mythical, and literary themes. There has been a revived interest in the study of the Pre-Raphaelites since the early 1990s (Orlando 614).

The official organization of the PRB lasted for only about seven years. That said, many of the most important and characteristic works of its individual members were carried out in the latter-half of the nineteenth century (Barringer 136). Although the PRB no longer held frequent meetings or consulted each other on artistic specificities, members still held to their original goal, to paint from nature. Similarly, they all tended to move away from depicting narratives, choosing to depict new kinds of subjects such as sexual desire, the relationship between the arts, and experiments with form, colour, and expression. Likewise, the Pre-Raphaelites habitually returned to themes of medievalism and mythology. With such a unique aesthetic, and with new notoriety,

the Pre-Raphaelite circle grew with new members; in the early 1860s avant-garde artists such as William and Jane Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, and Elizabeth Siddall were counted as members of the circle.

In the simplest terms, the Brotherhood was patriarchal, and only men could be official “Brothers” (Prettejohn *Art for Art Sake* 38). That said, there were a number of influential women associated with the group: Elizabeth Siddall, the wife Dante Gabriel Rossetti; Jane Morris, the wife of William Morris; Effie Gray, wife of John Ruskin and subsequently Millais; and Christina Rossetti, Dante’s sister. The book by Jan Marsh, *The Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood* (1985), has brought new attention and enthusiasm to the roles these women played in the group. These women were painters, artisans, costume designers, and poets. These women’s creative contributions to the Pre-Raphaelites are an important pillar of their success.

Many studies have examined the Pre-Raphaelites’ contributions to art, design, and literature. The creative type of artistic dress they wore themselves, and depicted in painting, has not been discussed at length. This major research project (MRP) endeavours to define, contextualize, and interpret the special kind of dress the women in the Pre-Raphaelite circle wore. Furthermore, I will examine the unique sources of costume the Pre-Raphaelites used in their paintings. I will also discuss the semiotic function of dress in Pre-Raphaelite works in the context of Victorian culture. Finally, I will examine the legacy and influence of Pre-Raphaelite dress, both worn and depicted in paintings, on subsequent painters and artistic dress movements. Research is drawn from nineteenth-century visual and literary culture, through both primary and secondary visual and textual sources.

The methods of research used in my MRP are varied. I used different qualitative historical methods, one being from material historians Norma Compton and Olive Hall whose

method of historical research consists of locating, integrating, and evaluating evidence from physical relics, written records, or documents in order to establish facts or generalizations past or present events (qtd. in Radcliffe 14).

My theoretical framework involves an interdisciplinary approach. I used formal visual techniques to analyze paintings. The method of analysis for these works was outlined by dress historian Lou Taylor. Her methods prescribe visually analyzing paintings noting that that visual sources can provide information on style, quality of fabric of garments, cut, hair-style, body stance, accessories, and exactly how they were worn. Paintings can furthermore reveal aspects about the sitter's sartorial gender, age-coding, and social aspirations. Taylor states:

no painting or drawing is free from personal preferences and prejudiced of its creator nor free from etiquettes, politics and prejudices of its day. It can be positively misleading to accept visual sources at face value because the relationships between the images and their cultural meanings are so multi-layered and complex. (*Dress History* 115)

The above principles were used to examine visual media in my research.

Due to the few remaining material examples of Pre-Raphaelite dress, I also relied on the techniques established by Stella Mary Newton in her book *Health, Art and Reason* (1974). Newton wrote specifically on the topic of Pre-Raphaelite dress and states that sources for information on historical costume are three pronged: surviving garments, literary descriptions, and contemporary pictorial works (27). With unsatisfactory surviving garments, dress historians must rely on the latter two. Furthermore, pictorial evidence must be supported by literary evidence (Newton 27). As Lou Taylor underlines in her book *The Study of Dress History*, “Newton was always clear that interpretations of paintings required supportive period textual

analysis in order to draw out the full weight of social nuances” (117). Literary sources were important in revealing socio-political codes in clothing. Analysis of “clothes in action” through period text can usefully identify indicative social rifts and stresses (107).

Lastly, I used the method of semiotic analysis for visual media. I used Roland Barthes’s model of semiotics. For Barthes, there is a sign, which is made up of a signifier, which could be an image/sound/word/piece of clothing, and the signified which is the concept evoked by said article. All of these methods were invaluable in examining the complicated topic of Pre-Raphaelite dress.

In mid-nineteenth century England, the scales of the population tipped; more people lived in urban centres than the rural countryside. The cities became more crowded and congested with people moving to work in the factories of the Industrial Revolution. As the country labourers moved to the cities, the gap between the rich and poor grew. The Pre-Raphaelites viewed this change as a terrible reality produced by modernization. As a consequence, they looked to the past for their guiding aesthetic ideas. The Middle Ages served to act as a compass for the Pre-Raphaelites. This view of the Middle Ages was always anchored in the vision of the beauty of everyday life in those times, in contrast to the ugliness of the present (Barringer 53).

This medievalism was influential in the eclectic kind of dresses they wore and the costumes they painted. They sought to marry the idealistic past with their distaste for modern artifice. Technological developments of the eighteenth century, followed by the invention of the sewing machine in the nineteenth century, facilitated a new demand for cheap mass-produced clothing (Entwistle 108). In the mid-nineteenth century, industrial crinolines and corsets were manufactured at a furious pace, which made these garments available to everyone. These fashions were very restrictive. Petticoats and crinolines were used to add volume to skirts which

made mobility difficult. The corset and practice of tight lacing were also popular at the time and, constant pressure on the body could lead to women feeling “languid and disinclined to walking out” as one anonymous correspondent confessed in 1842 (Roberts 181). Furthermore, clothing in Victorian society played a crucial role in communicating one’s propriety. Appearances and appropriateness came before the comfort of clothing. The Pre-Raphaelites sought to stand out from the restricted and mechanically produced masses with a different kind of dress.

This rejection of the mass-produced aspects of clothing led them to embrace ideas of naturalism. They saw naturalism as a way in which they could dress to be closer to their ideals of nature. They looked to sources of historic dress which they viewed as more natural because of their simple construction and silhouette. They rejected modern fashionable aspects of dress such as crinolines and corsets that constricted free bodily movement. They also chose colours which were derived from organic sources.

Why did the PRB dress in such a way that was dissimilar from the masses? There are a few reasons. Elizabeth Wilson emphasizes that the Pre-Raphaelite women were the first oppositional dressers in England, rejecting corsets and crinolines and adopting a sleeve type that did not restrict movement (209). Joanne Entwistle suggests that fashion was used at different times for different reasons to differentiate the group from the masses, making it visible and identifiable to other members (117).

There are two kinds of scholarly literature concerning Pre-Raphaelite dress. First, histories of costume focus on the kind of garments female Pre-Raphaelites wore on a day-to-day basis. Pre-Raphaelite dress is most often used as a supporting example in a larger argument about dress reform (Cunningham; Wilson). The fact the Pre-Raphaelites pioneered an alternative type of dress which was different from popular Victorian fashion dress is mentioned but somewhat

oversimplified (Newton 27; Thompson 158; Wilson 185). For example, the colours that the Pre-Raphaelites chose for their garments are often discussed but the discussion is reduced by saying that they preferred faded or “off tones” (Schaffer 109; Wilson 214). Writers also have discussed their rejection of the corset (Wilson 210; Yamaguchi 7). Why they chose to forgo the corset is often oversimplified with the explanation that the Pre-Raphaelites preferred to dress naturally. Much of the literature does not provide a clear definition of what dressing naturally meant to the Pre-Raphaelites. Similarly, the fact that the Pre-Raphaelites did not wear crinolines is often mentioned, yet again little explanation is given as to the reasons for this and it is often overlooked.

The second body of literature falls under the discipline of art history, and explores how Pre-Raphaelite dress was depicted in paintings. Often, these sources discuss Rossetti’s work at length (Ormond; Prettejohn; Yamaguchi). This literature focuses on the sources of the dress the PRB depict in their work, researching historical costume books and other paintings (Harris 53; Smith 47; Yamaguchi 17). Furthermore, they often oversimplify Pre-Raphaelite dress as descriptive evidence to support their own arguments about artistic values such as composition or narrative structure. The special type of dress the Pre-Raphaelites wore is not discussed in great detail. Art history literature tends to focus on the how women are depicted in Pre-Raphaelite art. In other words, literature often examines how women’s bodies, and hair and faces were depicted differently than popular academic art at the time (Callen 60; Casteras 30; Marsh *Women* 17). Also, the semiotic function of how clothes were viewed in Victorian culture is rarely discussed. For Pre-Raphaelites, the clothing they chose was meant to reveal something deeper about the painting’s meaning (Marsh *Women* 84; Shefer 57)

My MRP aims to fill the void between these two areas of research. I use the overlapping disciplines of both costume and art history to uncover details left out by both bodies of literature. Chapter 1: Pre-Raphaelite Dress: Natural, Artistic Fashion will discuss, and define, the eclectic type of dress the Pre-Raphaelite women wore. Their predisposition to dress naturally and design new clothes which allowed for freer movement will be covered.

The kinds of dress the Pre-Raphaelites painted in their works were different from other Victorian artists. Chapter 2: Fashionable Origins: Sources of Pre-Raphaelite Dress in Painted Works will examine the variety of sources the Pre-Raphaelites used to model garments in their works.

In Chapter 3: Fashion Codes: Semiotic Functions of Dress in Pre-Raphaelite Paintings. the clothing in Pre-Raphaelite works will be analyzed in light of Victorian cultural understandings of dress. The clothing Pre-Raphaelites depicted had coded meanings which unveil implications concerning class stratification, social injustices, ideas of the female body, and anti-industrialism.

Lastly, Chapter 4: The Sartorial Legacy of the Pre-Raphaelites examines later art and dress reform movements which were influenced by the dress depicted in Pre-Raphaelite paintings and worn by the Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood.

## **Chapter 1: Pre-Raphaelite Dress: Natural, Artistic Fashion**

The kinds of dress worn by women in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood circle were different from mainstream fashionable trends. The type of clothing they wore can be described as artistic, eclectic, and oppositional. Costume historians have explored this kind of dress before; scholars such as Stella Mary Newton, Elaine Shefer, and Elizabeth Wilson have studied selected aspects of PRB dress. These same writers have drawn conclusions about certain characteristics that make up the special type of dress worn by the women of the PRB. For example, they chose to dress in a way that they considered natural. Also, they used natural dyes, faded or “off tones” and jewel-like colours for their garments. In addition, women favoured an uncorseted silhouette, as it allowed them to dress in what they thought was a more authentic. They preferred a Watteau pleat for some of their dresses, which the fashionably dressed would have seen as atypical. Why did the PRB choose to dress in an oppositional fashion? Was it not enough to artistically paint, write, and design in ways that reflected their tastes? For the PRB, dress was another facet of a philosophy incorporated into their creative endeavours.

For the Pre-Raphaelites, opposition to current fashion trends was an integral part of their overall distaste for modern industry and aesthetics; dress was viewed as a different facet of design, one they felt they could improve upon (Newton 33). Their ideas about painting from nature and distaste for artifice permeated everything they did, including the clothes they preferred. During early meetings of the three founding members, William Holman Hunt, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and John Everett Millais discussed aesthetics, design, and dress. William Holman Hunt recorded these discussions and recounts how inventing garments was a natural inclination of Dante Gabriel Rossetti:



We speculated on improvement in all household objects, furniture, fabrics and other interior decorations. Nor did we pause till Rossetti enlarged upon the devising of ladies' dresses and the improvement of man's costume determining to follow the example of early artists in one branch of taste, but in all. (Holman Hunt 1: 51)

Dress was understood as something that could be improved upon. Using their unique artistic ideals they would create dress as they would paint, design, or write. It was an immersive design practice. The PRB wanted to live an authentic artistic existence, and creating new types of dress was integral to this goal. As with contemporary art, they thought fashionable dress was unattractive. Holman Hunt recounted a conversation with Dante Gabriel Rossetti:

I had grown to regard all decorative design as a part of a true artist's ambition, and I declare that until our craft again employed in the devising of beautiful forms, tastes in furniture, in costumes and even architecture would remain as bad as, or grown worse than it had been for the last fifty years. (Holman Hunt 1:110)

The PRB saw contemporary dress as garish and ugly and as a facet of design that had to be reformed and changed; they would do this with Pre-Raphaelite artistic dress. Women outside of the inner PRB circle also wore this unique style of dress, as Newton explained:

The circle of women who actually wore Pre-Raphaelite dress during the period of the Brotherhood's existence was not confined to Rossetti's models – Elizabeth Siddall Fanny Cornforth and Jane Morris – for Effie Ruskin on holiday in the highlands in the 1860s appears in sketches by Millais wearing picturesquely comfortable clothing. (Newton 32)

PRB dress was a type of fashion which aligned with their goal of dressing from nature. It was completely different from modern fashionable styles and for this reason, appealed to later dress reform movements.

The PRB attempted, both successfully and unsuccessfully, to incorporate naturalism into female dress. The PRB regarded female fashions as ugly and artificial (Entwistle 109). They thought that increasingly ornate, and complicated fashions such as the crinoline and corset, were unattractive (Wilson 209). They believed forgoing these features was a more “natural way” of dressing and they advocated flowing clothing that was less restrictive on the body. They endorsed clothing that was looser and allowed for more freedom of movement, eschewing the fashionable corset and crinoline cage. Facets of naturalism can be found in their dress, such as in the kinds of sleeves they used which differed from the restrictive fashions of the time, and the use of the Watteau pleat’s draping folds. The PRB chose not to use new chemical dyes, believing them to be artificial and garish. The colours and dyes that were used by the PRB were also in line with their views on naturalism. Women wore their hair unbound, alluding to their notion of true beauty and medievalism.

The PRB’s ideas regarding “natural dress” contradict contemporary theoretical ideas concerning the body. Elizabeth Wilson asserts that the attempt to dress naturally does not recognize that dress is no simple accommodation to the body as a biological entity, or geography. Rather dress “is a complex cultural form, as is the human conception of the body itself” (213). Joanne Entwistle echoes this premise, arguing that dress “is always an expression of culture and represents a body in a modified way” (109). In contrast, ideas about “natural dress” come from Romantic attitudes towards clothing and a simplistic view about the body and

its innate connection to nature (109). Nonetheless, the PRB's endeavours to dress this way are relevant; their significance lies in *why* they tried to dress in a way they considered more natural.

Fashionable dress in the 1840s, "although gentle in outline" was physically restrictive (Newton 31). Dresses were laced very tightly around the ribs and a number of petticoats were needed to build the skirt out to the fashionable bell-shape. Fashionable sleeves of the late 1830s and 1840s were set very low on the shoulder and tightly enclosed the upper arm, making it nearly impossible to raise the arm to be level with the shoulder (Roberts 176). Since the bodice was held firmly down around the waist, the arms could only be raised to a very limited extent. This particular dropped shoulder seam was fashionable until the mid-1860s (Newton 31-32). Women associated with the PRB abandoned this aspect of fashionable dress because it restricted natural movement (Wilson 210). Evidence of this modification was first pointed out by Stella Mary Newton in the photograph *Jane Morris* (fig. 1) posed by Dante Gabriel Rossetti in 1865. In this photograph it is visible that the shoulder seam is set loosely on the shoulder "giving complete freedom of arm movement" (Newton 32). The sleeves were a version of the "leg o' mutton style." Full at the top and narrow at the wrist, this style was set high enough on the shoulder to allow natural movement. The other style of sleeves Morris wears during the photography session were very full and gathered, the bottom of the sleeve flared into a wide bell which was tied at the forearm and folded back to expose the lining (fig. 2). In the 1870s, the fashion and beauty writer, and doyenne of taste, Mary Eliza Haweis, describes the construction of this type of sleeve, "a straight piece of muslin of the required width, simply tied at the wrist with a ribbon, at once makes the bishops sleeve. It is the frilling at the wrist which continues its chief beauty, and which is a primitive form" (qtd. in Radcliffe 309).

An idealized depiction of unrestricted movement of the arm is depicted in John Everett Millais's *Apple Blossoms (Spring)*, 1856-8 (fig 3). In this pastoral scene eight female figures enjoy a picnic in an apple orchard. One character, wearing a moss green dress, gracefully extends her arm to request a drink of water. This gesture exhibits a shoulder seam that allows for a full range of motion. Although the exact model for this character is unknown, two of the models were closely associated with the Pre-Raphaelites. These were Sophie and Alice Grey, sisters to Effie Ruskin, who later married John Millais. Sophie Grey was the model for the girl on the far left and Alice Grey appears twice: resting her head in hand in the center of the composition, and lying on her back in the right. This painting illustrates what the Pre-Raphaelites thought was an ideal form of natural dress.

The women in the PRB circle rejected the fashionable full skirt of the mid-nineteenth century. In the 1850s, one of the ways that such volume was added was through numerous petticoats. As fashion trends dictated fuller skirts, women piled on petticoats which were stiffened with starch or stuffed with horsehair. These petticoats were used to create a silhouette which emphasized a narrow point above the skirt, what was referred to as a "wasp-waist," a shape which was not cultivated by Pre-Raphaelites. The switch from petticoats to the crinoline cage came in the 1850s; the change was not immediate, but in either case the PRB circle did not wear full versions of either of these aspects of traditional mainstream fashionable dress. By the mid-1850s and through most of the 1860s the crinoline, or cage (as it was occasionally called), replaced petticoats. The crinoline's invention eliminated the need for numerous petticoats, its complicated apparatus surrounded women with hoops of steel. Though lighter than multiple layers of petticoats, there were many difficulties associated with wearing the cumbersome crinoline. Movement was made difficult when the circumference could exceed five yards

(Roberts 177). The crinoline was not favoured by Pre-Raphaelites (Ormond “Dress” 26-27). In contrast to wearing the cage or crinoline, the women associated with the PRB chose to wear clothing that was loose on the body. As William Holman Hunt’s granddaughter recounts, his wife Fanny Hunt, “never wore crinolines or stays, but dressed in the Pre-Raphaelite fashion which was all the rage amongst the *avant garde*...” (D. N. Hunt qtd. in Shefer 57). They chose dresses which flowed comfortably over the body and knees, in a way which would have been impossible with numerous petticoats or a crinoline.

One of the aspects of dress they used which compensated for not wearing fashionable voluminous skirts was the use of the Watteau pleat. In the photo *Jane Morris*, taken in 1865 (fig.1), the photo’s namesake is wearing PRB dress, the waist-belt is not tightly laced, but draped in front; the dress also had a Watteau pleat, and was likely received in fashionable circles as atypical (Newton 32). Previous scholars have used the Watteau pleat as a formal descriptive element of dress, but tended to ignore why the PRB women chose to incorporate this aspect into their garments. The Watteau pleat is a type of boxed pleat, which emerges from the back neckline and is draped in panels. This type of pleat is a version of the eighteenth-century Watteau pleat, closely associated with the *sacque*-dress. The style of dress was also associated with the *robe à la Française*, and can be characterized by its flowing pleats from the shoulder. It was commonly added to a fitted understructure which gave an impression of looseness. The shape and effect of the Watteau pleat fits opportunely into the principles of Pre-Raphaelite dress. The wearer of this type of fashion could forgo a corset because only the yoke and shoulders were fitted (Radcliffe 282). The picture of *Jane Morris* in 1865 (fig. 4) shows the dramatic fullness of the PRB Watteau back. In the mid-1860s, this type of voluptuous drapery would have been seen as eclectic. Only about five years later are these pleats seen in a type of informal garment known

as the tea-gown which was worn in the privacy of the home by hostesses. These dresses were usually cut in the close-fitting princess form, with a Watteau pleat falling in a wide box pleat from the shoulder (Buck 66).

A vital part of a proper woman`s wardrobe in the mid-nineteenth century was the corset. The laced corset was nearly ubiquitous in England throughout the nineteenth century. It was designed to change the proportions of the body to adhere more closely with the feminine ideal of the small waist which was a dominant feature in fashionable dress. It also constricted the diaphragm, forcing women to breathe from the upper part of the chest, resulting in constant uncomfortable breathing (Roberts 178). Pre-Raphaelite women often went without the stylish corset (Yamaguchi 7). One of the reasons they did not wear the corset was because it was considered an artificial constraint on the natural form of the body.

The corset restricted the body in a way they viewed as unnatural, one which ultimately contradicted their ideas about the body as a pure form. There was importance placed on a genuine waistline. In PRB dress, the waist was either high, or in a natural placement (Cunningham 113). Wilkie Collins wrote about the desirable PRB woman`s figure: “her waist, perfection in the eyes of man, for it occupied its natural circle, it was visibly and delightfully undeformed by stays” (Collins qtd. in Cunningham 113).<sup>1</sup> The women in the PRB circle were some of the first to go without the fashionable corset (Thompson 158). The PRB`s study of classical, medieval, and early Renaissance works influenced their ideas concerning the true placement of the waist. The PRB knew that clothing worn in earlier periods, when placed on a female figure would easily reveal the shape of the human body underneath (Cunningham 106).

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<sup>1</sup> The waistline had slowly been rising since 1860. By 1865 the waistline had reached such a height, that the magazine the “*Queen*” pronounced that the style of the empire was about to return (Buck 41).

Similarly, ancient examples of Greek statues were viewed as a perfect example of an unaltered, natural, and beautiful figure (116).

Pre-Raphaelite dress was conceived at a point where the waist and corset was a focus of fashion. During this time, the moulding of the female waist was more dramatic than it had ever been. Industrialization and mass-produced corsetry could shape the malleable female body (Vincent 41). The modern notion of “one size fits all” resonates when thinking of how the corset formed the body; no longer were garments made to fit you, your body was made to fit the garment. The materials used for these corsets were stronger and stiffer than in previous styles, more resilient to wear and less likely to yield to the body of the wearer. There were many types of advertisements which linked the corset to modern industry (42). Valarie Steele notes a particular example of “trading card” advertisements which illustrated corsets and industrial chimneys in the background, conflating the corset and industrialization (Steele 45). The corset and corseted body was therefore a symbol of modernity. The corseted female body was an incarnation of technological and modern supremacy over the human form. In the 1851 Great Exhibition in London, the manufacturing section had nineteen delegates that exhibited corsets and related innovations. Innovations such as steel stays and spring fastenings were shown as a sign of enlightened progress in women’s fashion (Vincent 42-43). At the very same occasion these modern, technological advancements were deployed to exemplify what a modern shape should be, the PRB were cultivating their contradictory views. In response to aspects of industrialization, mass production, and material duplications shown at the Great Exhibition, the PRB held to their credo of truth to nature and a rejection of mechanical artifice.

Scholars have consistently oversimplified the Pre-Raphaelites’ rejection of the corset as a Romantic preference for dressing naturally. While this is largely the case, there were other

factors as well. As mentioned, the Pre-Raphaelites consistently refused to conform to new industrial products. Dressing naturally and rejecting industrialism are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are both important interrelated facets in understanding the interrelated reasons why the Pre-Raphaelites rejected the corset.

The palette of colours the Pre-Raphaelites used for their dress reflected their aesthetic tastes alluding to naturalism, medievalism, and distaste for chemical contrivance. The increased interest in industrialization and mechanical production in the mid-nineteenth century led to many new inventions and discoveries in clothing dyes, which were products of such innovations. In the 1850s aniline dyes were invented. Rendered from coal tar, these dyes made a new spectrum of colours possible, such as electric blue, magenta, lime green, mustard, sulfur yellow, and Caribbean blue. Aniline dyes had become popular in mass fashion. William Henry Perkin's chemical experiment led him to the discovery of a mauve dye; in the early 1860s, this colour dominated society's trends, women were only fashionable if they wore "divine mauve" (Findlay qtd. in Casselman 20). Pre-Raphaelites viewed chemically derived colours as ugly and inauthentic (Wilson 214). The importance of organic dyes derived from natural sources was considered an important facet of colour choice for the Pre-Raphaelites. In addition, the rejection of chemical dyes may have to do with the social reception of new chemical inventions. In the culture of cloth as well as in art and craft, natural and chemical dyes were considered to be binary oppositional products (Casselman 18). It was assumed that a natural dye *could not* have the same properties as chemical dyes, which was not true. For example, many natural dyes needed chemical components to make the dyes bond to fabrics. It was thought that chemical dyes could not fade, or would fade less than organic dyes, which was not factual (18). The benefits and deficiencies of both dye types were hotly debated by scientists, leading society women, and



art critics closely associated with the PRB. John Ruskin commented that, “no colour harmony is of a high order unless it involves indescribable tints” (qtd. in Wilson 214). Ruskin’s assertions about colour in art resonated with the PRB.

Natural dyes were used by the Pre-Raphaelites because they were considered authentic. The artisan who created natural dyes functioned comfortably within the Ruskin model of utopianism which centered on the artisanal life (Casselman 13). There was a belief, (whether it be accurate or not), that natural dyes were not commonly used after the advent of aniline dyes. This led to the contention that dyeing cloth or clothing using natural dyes was a “lost art” whose recovery and utilization “was an act cultural salvation” (19). These layers of meaning, rejection of chemical artifice, using natural dyes and favouring natural colours, all manifest in the Pre-Raphaelites’ desire to use fabric to meet their goal of dressing authentically. Although authenticity was situated as a social construct, its multilayered meanings imbue Pre-Raphaelite dress with cultural meaning and significance. In this case, artificial colours derived from industrial manufacturing were seen as artificial and unnatural.

The choice of rich and jewel-like tones comes from the Pre-Raphaelite predisposition towards medievalism. As they studied medieval examples of dress, they likely examined illuminated manuscripts. In these early Renaissance depictions, costumes were often coloured with a rich blue. This blue colour was one of the most expensive colours used in manuscripts; it was rendered from the stone *lapis lazuli*, which was only quarried in current day Afghanistan. The PRB looked to these manuscripts as guides in what colours they favoured for clothing. In addition, the blue colour that was depicted in these manuscripts is an accurate illustration of a blue type of dye used in the middle ages. This blue dye came from the natural source of woad that had been used in England since the ninth century (Scott 28). With rich blue colours depicted

in medieval visual sources, and the historical woad dye used for clothing, it is easy to appreciate why Pre-Raphaelites would gravitate towards using this colour for garments.

Unbound, loose, and flowing hair came to be a defining characteristic of the Pre-Raphaelite stunner. Unbound hair would have been received as atypical, as fashionable hairstyles for women in the mid-nineteenth century were exceptionally ornate. Large braids would be wound around the head and sometimes topped with a velvet tiara and augmented with trimmings and pearls. In the latter part of the 1850s, hair would be brushed back and set in a net of silk braids which was called a snood (Doyle 16).<sup>2</sup> Loose hair was only worn in public by children. Hair was always worn up; in womanhood, hair was only unbound when a woman was in a state of “undress,” such as retiring to bed or waking from sleep (Marsh *Women* 48).

In depictions of PRB women, typically hair would be worn down unbound, or loosely bound. Jan Marsh has gone so far as to say that a discerning feature of a Pre-Raphaelite woman was her hair. She insists that loose flowing hair was a “chief signifier of the term ‘Pre-Raphaelite’” (Marsh *Women* 23). In the 1865 photography session with model Jane Morris, posed by Rossetti, differences can be seen in the ways in which Jane wears her hair. In one photograph (fig. 2), Jane’s hair is bound smoothly at the back of her head. In another (fig. 5), it is apparent that her hair has been manipulated to appear frizzier and looser. When Jane and May Morris wore their curly hair out to a social event, it was met with a negative reaction as recorded in a diary entry of Jennet Marshall in 1883. In it, she less than sympathetically wrote that Jane and May Morris’s “hair was fuzzy” (qtd. in Radcliffe 311).

Visual examples of unbound hair often allude to medievalism. Unbound hair and its association with a medieval damsel can be found in Rossetti’s *Hist! Said Kate and the Queen* (c.1850). Here, the maids brush the long unbound tresses of a love-sick princess (Bartram 139).

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<sup>2</sup> A snood can structurally be understood as a modern day hairnet (Doyle 16).

Later works of Rossetti exemplify his idealization of unbound hair. In Rossetti's *Fazio's Mistress (Aurelia)* (1863) (fig. 6), the sensual woman is shown after washing her hair. While still damp, Aurelia absentmindedly plaits her hair; when dried the hair would take on a "naturally crimped looked" (Marsh *Women* 23). Wearing unbound hair challenged rigid social codes which were associated with a Victorian stratified class society. Paintings that depicted women with hair down were described as "coarse" or even "inflammatory" which hinted at a negative opinion that women with unbound hair were of a lower class (Casteras 23).

Just as hair worn down was seen as something that alluded to a medieval ideal, embroidery was associated with authentic medieval craftsmanship. Pre-Raphaelites' understanding of embroidery was married to their nostalgia for an era of pre-capitalistic production. Embroidering was an important signifier of status, particularly for the middle classes due to its ability to evoke a "timeless" era of chivalry and honour. As well as evoking a medieval ideal, needlework played a crucial role in the construction of Victorian femininity (George and Campbell 55). In the nineteenth century the Pre-Raphaelite circle valued handmade embroideries for their irregularity. Fashionable, mainstream Victorians appreciated the new "perfectness" of manufactured goods. The PRB and those who shared their beliefs viewed this manufactured perfection as artifice. John Ruskin, Charles Eastlake, and William Morris celebrated irregularity as a positive sign of defiance against the "triumph of the machine" (Freedgood 630).

In the PRB circle, embroidery was viewed as an important aspect of dressmaking and millenary. Women were expected to show their artistic sensibilities through augmenting their garments with a great deal of creativity with the proper combination of embroideries and trimmings (Schaffer 77). Jane Morris was a well-known embroiderer. She writes about how she learnt how to stitch with her husband William:

He taught me the first principles of laying the stitches together so as to cover the ground smoothly and radiating them properly. Afterwards we studied old pieces by unpicking etc. we learnt much – but it was uphill work, fascinating, but only carried through by his energy and perseverance. (qtd. in Callen 158)

Jane Morris was the best embroiderer in the PRB circle and would become one of the most renowned figures in the Arts and Craft movement. Her designs were appreciated for their intricacies, and originality. Jane patented a number of her designs; in a letter Rossetti responds to Mrs. Aglaia Coronio in regard to her inquiry of a particular embroidery design: “I wish I could send you the flower pattern but the copyright of it belongs to Janey who expressed an intention of embroidering it herself, and I still hope she means to do so. Should she have changes her mind I am sure she will transfer it to you” (qtd. in Shefer 59). Rossetti obviously gave credit of the stitch pattern to Jane. Her designs were so ornately unique that they were sought after by PRB followers. In addition, her daughter May Morris was a highly accomplished embroiderer as well, and she eventually supervised her father’s tapestry firm. These stitching skills would have been considered especially important in the artistic circles where aesthetics and harmonious beauty were viewed as essential. Embroidery is seen adorning the garments of Jane Morris during the 1865 photography session; a thin strip of embroidery embellishes the hem of Jane’s sleeve as well as her jewel neckline and was further placed lengthwise on the sleeves (fig. 2).

Although embroidery was frequently associated with Victorian ideals of femininity, the PRB blurred these barriers and would embroider themselves. As read, William Morris learned how to stitch with partner Jane. William Holman Hunt himself embroidered a garment with gold thread which he used as a costume prop. In the nineteenth century it was uncommon for

gender roles to be disregarded in the way the Pre-Raphaelites did, even considering their place in society as bohemians. This exemplifies the lengths the PRB circle would go to maintain what they thought was an authentic way to create clothing.

Many PRB paintings depict women working on embroidery. Medieval inspired examples include Millais's *Mariana* (1851), where the heroine stands up and stretches her back which is sore from hunching over her stitch work (fig. 7). In the same way, in Rossetti's *Mariana* (1868-70) where Jane Morris is the model, she delicately holds her embroidery needle and toys with the strands of unstitched thread (fig. 8). Examples of embroidery on clothing are numerous in PRB art; in William Holman Hunt's *Valentine Rescuing Sylvia from Proteus* (1851), Sylvia wears a lavishly embroidered bodice. In Millais's *Sophie Grey* (1857), a delicate embroidered heart with flowers adorns her top; the pattern is quite simple and was likely done by one of the Pre-Raphaelites (fig. 9).

Without the crinoline and corset, and wearing a completely different pallet of colours, the PRB women would have appeared much different from the fashionable ladies of the day. Georgiana Burne-Jones, wife of Edward Burne-Jones, recounts how different Elizabeth Siddall's dress was from contemporary styles: "Lizzie's slender elegant figure...comes back to me, in a graceful and simple dress, the incarnate opposite of the 'tailor-made' young lady" (qtd. in Yamaguchi 7). The "tailor-made" lady referred to someone who had their fashionable clothing made by a professional tailor or seamstress; the "opposite" therefore was a woman who made her own clothes.<sup>3</sup> As members of the middle-class, Lizzie Siddall, Jane Morris, and Fanny Cornforth did not have tailor-made clothes but rather made most garments themselves. In Rossetti's sketch of Siddall in 1854, she wears her typical loose, flowing dress (fig. 10). A

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<sup>3</sup> There was also an understanding that "tailor-made" clothes, with the cut, construction and material were masculine (Taylor 341).

letter from Dante Gabriel Rossetti to his sister Christina in 1852 describes Lizzie's dressmaking: "that love has lately made herself a grey dress, also a black one, the first bringing out her characteristics as a 'meek unconscious dove,' while the second enhances her qualifications as *rara avis in terris* by rendering her *nigro simillima cygno*"<sup>4</sup> (qtd. in Shefer 57).

Jane Morris was also an accomplished seamstress, who made her own clothes. She was a co-designer with Rossetti for a number of garments depicted in several works such as *Mrs. William Morris* also known as the *Blue Silk Dress* (fig. 11) and was used in the aforementioned *Mariana*, both started in 1868 (Mancoff 396). Dresses that Jane wore in many drawings and sketches such as *Mrs. Morris* in 1872 were presumably made by Jane, and will be discussed in a later chapter. Jane's daughter May Morris fondly recalled the dress worn in the portrait as "a delicious simple silk gown of shot blue and brown and was a favorite with the girls. It had some fragile ornament of gold thread at the throat and wrists, and it was of a delicate faintly-rustling texture, that we were never tired of stroking" (qtd. in Mancoff 396). After the dress was originally used as a costume prop, it was then incorporated into Jane's wardrobe and was associated with her everyday appearance (Mancoff 396). Jane also made clothes for her family. In a family photograph taken with the Burne-Jones family in 1874, the similar dresses worn by Jane and her two daughters indicate that that Jane was the maker of her family's clothes (Shefer 60) (fig. 12).

Elizabeth Siddall was the original Pre-Raphaelite dresser. She influenced the sartorial tastes of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's and the entire PRB circle. Too often male members of the Pre-Raphaelites are credited with devising this special kind of dress. They likely had the majority of artistic agency in deciding what to do with garments depicted in paintings, but when it came to the making of garments and day-to-day dress, the Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood

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<sup>4</sup> Latin for "a rare bird in the lands" and "very like a black swan."

made many aesthetic decisions. The women in the group shared and cultivated their ideas alongside the male founders of the PRB. Without their aesthetic predispositions and talents, PRB dress would not have been as influential or different as it was.

## **Chapter 2: Fashionable Origins: Sources of Pre-Raphaelite Dress in Painted Works**

The Pre-Raphaelites generally avoided painting fashionable nineteenth-century dress, preferring to use rich and varied colors and patterns in costume which could be found in ancient, medieval and the early Renaissance eras (Ormond “Dress” 26). Since practically no garments survived from those earlier periods, the PRB used other sources of historical costume. There were two ways in which the PRB could paint such distinctive garments: either to have specially designed clothing made for their sitters to be painted in, or to rely on secondary sources, either books on historical dress or costumes in historical plays (Newton 28). Neither of these options was entirely satisfactory. The first was expensive and maintaining accuracy to what they thought of as “natural reconstruction” of the garments often demanded costly fabrics. Conversely, costume books were not ideal because they showed only one view of an outfit; in addition, writers of these books rarely understood what the garments were actually like worn on the body (Newton 28). Newton was correct in saying that clothing had to be specially made or inspired from pictorial sources.

Illustrated sources were needed by the PRB because it was impossible to make every garment they depicted. These sources were deemed acceptable by the PRB because they directly referenced the garments of the past; since these original garments were not actually available to use as props, these sources represented the next best thing. Although costume source books were an essential to the PRB for creating historical garments, they were not their only reference; they would also create clothing they would paint. They preferred the latter option as a source of dress, as it was more closely aligned with their beliefs about painting from nature.

There was an interest in depicting dress accurately in the nineteenth century, both in historic and contemporary costume. Interest in historical accuracy began with the history



paintings executed by Benjamin West found as early as 1780. By the 1840s, history painting occupied a large segment of nineteenth-century art, and “as far as its public was concerned, its duty was to make the past alive and present again” (Harris 47). Artists were charged with the same task as historians, to show truth through the vivid representation of particular facts and “all their particularities of their dress and their time” (*Art Union* qtd. in Harris 47). Because of the Pre-Raphaelites’ interest in medieval, mythical, and classical subjects, they felt a great need to paint dress from actual garments when they could. Criticisms concerning the accuracy of clothing were common in Royal Academy exhibition reviews. The task of painting historical costumes may have been daunting for the PRB who were self-conscious and endeavoured to paint truth from nature. Leonee Ormond argues that so much attention was paid to the depiction of rich fabrics and costumes that dress and its rich materials was the primary concern for Victorian artists (Ormond “Millais” 37).

This interest in depicting luxurious clothing is seen in the PRB’s attempts to gather examples of these lavish items. Depicting them accurately was a difficult and appreciated task. Critics and biographers would often mention the depictions of cloth and drapery used in painting. Great care was taken by the PRB in planning garments and drapery they would depict. In some of Rossetti’s examples, the preparatory sketches focused on the drapery and the garment.

Rossetti’s sketch *Mrs. Morris* (1873) is an example of this interest in depicting clothing (fig. 13).

In the mid-nineteenth century, many reference books on historical dress were published. James Robinson Planche’s *History of British Costume* (1834), Charles Knight’s *Pictorial History of England* (1837), and Fredrick William Fairholt’s *Costume in England* (1846) exemplify interest in dress from the past. One of these types of books stands out as particularly influential on the PRB and their depictions of dress; this is Camille Bonnard’s *Costumes Historiques* (1829-

30) with engravings by Paul Mercuri. The book can be likened to a modern coffee table publication, as it contains large and elegant plates, minimal text, and when originally published was expensive (Smith 28). This reference text has been of great interest to art historians in terms of its influence on PRB dress. It has proven to be a source book for several PRB's depictions of medieval dress, particularly in the work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. In an undated letter to G.F. Stephens, Rossetti boasts that he had purchased a copy of *Costumes Historiques*, "Now a piece of grand news. My dear P.B.R. I have got a Bonnard!!!! A most stunning copy too, with india proof impressions. The publishing price is 6 guineas. For mine I gave 3 pounds & it is perfectly new" (qtd. in Smith 32). D.G. Rossetti likely purchased his coveted copy in 1849 (Harris 52). A number of usual and sometimes peculiar details from Bonnard are illustrated in D.G. Rossetti's medieval costumes. The drawings and tracings D.G. Rossetti made of costumes were of great interest to the rest of the PRB, as his brother William Michael Rossetti recorded in the *P.R.B. Journal* on Friday May 25, 1849: "Hunt called again this morning...Gabriel learned the object of his previous visits was to see Gabriel's tracings of costume" (W.M. Rossetti 6). With a copy of *Costumes Historiques*, and several commissions for historical subjects, Rossetti used his new reference to copy and create imaginative medieval costumes.

Rossetti obviously borrowed from Bonnard's illustration of a fourteenth-century Italian dress. In this plate an elaborate female costume is shown with a unique sleeve made up of overlapping peacock feathers, it is reproduced by D.G. Rossetti in his work *Sir Lancelot in the Queen's Chambers* (1847) (Harris 53) (fig. 14). Many types of sleeves with cuffs, balloon sleeves, hanging sleeves, or scalloped sleeves which appear often in Rossetti's medieval work are likely taken from Bonnard. Rossetti favoured the detail of slashed sleeves which were taken from Bonnard's plate entitled "Scene de Moers" (fig. 15). Rossetti depicted this type of sleeve in

*The Carlisle Wall* (1853) (Yamaguchi 17) (fig. 16). There are other instances where Rossetti has used Bonnard's text as a guide; however, many of these examples are not unusual or distinctive enough to link them directly to Bonnard's text (Harris 53).

Another example of borrowing is seen in Rossetti's *The Blue Closet* (1857) (fig. 17); the patterns on the dress on the left duplicate Bonnard's patterning on the garment "Finaçailles" (fig. 18) (Yamaguchi 15). Art historian Elizabeth Prettejohn has closely studied the costume in *The Blue Closet*, and her findings give insight into how Rossetti devised medieval costumes. She argues that research into the costumes will not be conclusive, for the details of the figures' dress range rather widely in the date of historical origin. She notes:

According to costume books readily available at the time the watercolour was made, the white streamer and the row of buttons on the sleeve of the green-clad figure on the right are fourteenth-century, and pre-date not only the late fifteenth-century linen head dress worn by the same figure but the style of the sleeve itself with a long continuous cuff overlapping the wrist and hand. (Prettejohn

*Aestheticism* 23)

Prettejohn asserts that details are carefully copied from standard reference works, but are abstracted from their contexts and recombined in arbitrary ways (23). Harris echoes this idea, claiming that it is unlikely that Rossetti copied a complete costume from *Costumes Historiques*, or any other primary or secondary source for that matter. Rather, Rossetti's imaginative costumes show quotation and reinterpretation of medieval costume, a truly Pre-Raphaelite version of medieval dress (Harris 53). In other words, although the PRB were interested in accurate sources of medieval dress, they allowed their own utopic view of the past to influence their depictions of it.

Other Pre-Raphaelites confronted the task of painting medieval dress in a more scholarly way. For example, Burne-Jones and Morris depended on original sources such as illuminated manuscripts. Burne-Jones often visited the British museum to look at *Roman de la Rose*, a late fifteenth-century manuscript. He used this as a guide to create garments which accurately reflected the International Gothic style of clothing. Worthy of note, a long sleeve type which was popular in the fifteenth century, and is found numerous times in the *Roman de la Rose* appears in the Morris' painting *La Belle Iseult* (1858) (fig. 19). Similarly, on a cabinet decorated by Morris, known as *St. George's Cabinet* (1861) the dress worn by the princess, a sideless surcoat and the boxy headdress, are accurate depictions of fourteenth century dress (Harris 57).

"Truth to nature" prompted the Pre-Raphaelites to make or commission reproductions of medieval clothing in which they could dress their sitters. Models had to be able to wear clothes which were appropriate to the situation as well as to the period indicated in the paintings (Newton 26). Ford Maddox Brown made garments for his painting *Chaucer at the Court of Edward II* (1845-51) (fig. 20). He records his endeavours to collect fabric and make garments in various diary entries in 1847. He recounts, "[I] walked all over London, in the pursuit of scoffs for the draperies and costumes for the Chaucer picture" (qtd. in Harris 51). Considerable amounts of work went into the construction of costumes for this piece. On October 22, Brown himself was making ears for the jester's hood, while a seamstress he employed made Chaucer's tunic. On November 3, the dressmaker came again, "work women here making ye brocade hood (7 hours work)" (qtd. in Harris 51).

John Everett Millais also shopped for fabric to make costumes. As a self-conscious gentleman, he was somewhat uncomfortable shopping for fabrics, which was assumed to be a feminine task; he recounts in a letter that, "I am deep in the mystery of purchasing velvets and

silk draperies for my pictures *Mariana* and *Woodman's Daughter* a shopman simpers with astonishment at the request coming from a male [human]"<sup>5</sup> (qtd. in J.G. Millais 1:94). The deep blue dress in *Mariana* (1851) (fig.7) was well-received by contemporaries; Millais's son boasted, "generally since the days of Albrecht Dürer no studies of draperies and details, nothing so earnest and complete has been achieved in all of art" (J.G. Millais 1:109).

Few of these costume props ever survived (Harris 51). The rarity of surviving PRB garments makes the extant cloak, dress, and sideless gown in the collection of the William Morris Gallery interesting specimens. The dress design has been attributed to William Morris circa 1875-8 (52). The dress is light pink in colour and the white linen overgown are cut in the style popular in fourteenth century England, "which is characterised by a closely fitting upper body, deeply cut away at the sides and a fullish shirt whose volume is increased by the insertion of gores" (51). Harris has concluded that this dress was used as a model for Guinevere's dress in the Oxford Union Murals (1857); she further argues the dress was also used as a prop in the now lost picture *Tristram Recognized by the Dog he had Given Iseult* (52).

During a stay in Kelmscott manor in 1873, Rossetti sent a letter to his assistant Treffry Dunn inquiring about misplaced medieval costume props:

[I cannot] guess at all what has become of all the medieval costumes I used to have.

For instance I remember distinctly one women's dress – cote-hardie, open up at the sides and kirtle to go under it – of white velvet quartered with yellow ...Are you sure that none are mislaid upstairs or elsewhere? (qtd. in Harris 51)

Two years after this letter, he wrote another referring to a number of textiles that he had just received but a garment he requested was missing, "a female mediaeval dress of the kind I mean. I referred to those made with a loin girdle. If you conveniently can, you might send me one – with

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<sup>5</sup> Millais actually used the phrase "human biped."

sleeves of the long hanging kind” (qtd. in Ormond “Dress” 27). Types of dress such as this were used in D.G. Rossetti’s “medieval period” and were depicted in sketches such as *Guinevere* (1848) (Shefer 56) (fig. 21). By the 1860s, the interest in medieval depictions waned. The close attention paid to accuracy had slackened, and the PRB began to look to other time periods for their subjects and dress.

The PRB also shopped for previously-made garments for use in their studios. The painting *Ophelia* (1851-2) (fig. 22) by Sir John Everett Millais is one of the PRB’s most famous works. It depicts a critical moment in Shakespeare’s play *Hamlet*, where the tragic heroine Ophelia committed suicide out of grief. Highly significant was her soaked dress, which weighted her down to her watery death. The model for his work was Elizabeth Siddall; she wore a fine silver embroidered dress which she modelled lying in a heated bathtub. This dress was bought by Millais from an antique shop for four pounds, which was a considerable amount of money at the time. In March 1852, Millais wrote to a letter to a friend Mrs. Combe regarding the purchase of this dress:

To-day I have purchased a really splendid lady’s ancient dress- all flowered over in silver embroidery-and I am going to paint it for “Ophelia.” You may imagine it is something rather good when I tell you it cost me, old and dirty as it is, four pounds.  
(qtd. in J.G. Millais 162)

As the subject of the work was a woman submerged in water, the dirt would not have mattered. What is interesting here is Millais’s interest in finding a suitable garment for his subject, one that would have aligned with the story of a weighted, drowned tragic figure. The dress was viewed as an integral part of the scene depicted. Arthur Hughes noted that it was essential for both the model and the dress to be submerged in water so “the artist might get the proper set of the

garments in water and...aqueous effects” (qtd. in Marsh *Their Lives* 22). Without the convincing garment that appeared weighted down by water, the picture would not have been as effective.

Millais painted various contemporary dresses in his career, not shunning it as harshly as D.G. Rossetti and William Morris. One of the reasons that Millais depicted more fashionable costumes was that he was sometimes employed as an illustrator for popular works such as *Cornhill Magazine*. He worked with models of modern costumes as well as medieval ones; however, his work containing the former generally possessed a greater immediacy and sophistication (Sanders 83). In the painting *Black Brunswicker* (1859-60) (fig. 23) a woman grasps her sweetheart, a member of the German volunteer cavalry, just before he leaves to fight in the Waterloo Campaign during the Napoleonic Wars, where his unit was decimated. The dress the woman wears presented Millais the difficult challenge of rendering shining silk which he painted from life. Like other artists of the time he was interested in showing the effect of the fall and substance of rich materials in his work, and this suggests that artists liked to show-off their talent for depicting colour and textile surfaces (Ormond “Millais” 37). The male wears a jacket that was typical of a German Brunswicker cavalryman uniform. Millais describes, “[the Brunswickers] wore a black uniform with death’s head and cross bones...” and goes on about both garments, “the costume and incident are so powerful that I am astonished it has never been touched upon before” (qtd. in J.G. Millais 1:350-353). Because of the remarkable depiction of costume, *The Black Brunswicker* was one of Millais best received works.

The PRB, particularly D.G. Rossetti, painted various works inspired by Greco-Roman myths. In the nineteenth century, Greek imagery was popular; contemporary archaeological finds and the Elgin Marbles brought to England encouraged this new interest.<sup>6</sup> Between the 1860s and

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<sup>6</sup> There were many archaeological finds in the nineteenth century which created a renewed interest in the classical world all over Europe; rediscoveries included Charles Robert Cockrell’s (1788-1863) Aphaia at Aegina and the

1870s the Elgin Marbles and Greek collection was the star attraction in the British Museum; artists such as the PRB often sketched the marble statues and the famous frieze. Casts of famous Greek statues were a popular source of artistic stimulus for the PRB. The Royal Academy had a large collection of casts which Rossetti often sketched, and in his own studio he had two plaster casts of *Venus de Milo* and *Venus antique* (Faxon 79). The sculpted draping on *Venus de Milo* was a source of inspiration for D.G Rossetti's work on classical subjects. In the 1870s, he did a series of images which derived from classical myth such as *Pandora* (1869-71), *The Roman Widow* (1874) and *Proserpine* (1872). In the work *Proserpine* (fig. 24), the blue garment worn by model Jane Morris occupies over a third of the canvas. The garment has an exaggerated amount of drapery; the fabric from the shoulder seam artificially appears to be weightless, creating a more dramatically modelled effect. It appears Rossetti is trying to paint a sculpted garment. Rossetti painted *Proserpine* and other such mythical subjects with the drapery of his *Venus de Milo* as an inspiration.

As I have argued, there has been a focus of research on historical references in PRB costume in paintings. The fact that the PRB were depicted in their day-to-day clothing is often overlooked. As described in chapter one, the dress of women in PRB was different from fashionable dress and took on different characteristics of shape, colour, and how it contoured the body. The figures in *The Bower Meadow* (1872) (fig.25) show (exaggerated) characteristics of PRB dress; features such as no corset, voluminous sleeves, and no petticoats or crinolines all exemplify Pre-Raphaelite costume. In the photo *Jane Morris* (1865) (fig. 26) model Jane wears a gown which she and other female Pre-Raphaelites habitually wore in Rossetti's sketch on January 2, 1872 of Jane Morris, she is depicted in very similar costume to the dress she was photographed in six years earlier (fig 27). This is an indication that she often wore this style of clothing. In a

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temple of Apollo Epicurus at Basses. Various British books were published on these finds which contain sources the PRB would have also used (Faxon 78-79).



letter to Jane, Rossetti asks her for old clothes which he can dress other models in, “the extreme usefulness of the dresses of yours which I have induced me to ask any more ‘Old Clo’ of an artistic cut and material. If so you might make a bundle for this Hebrew” (D.G. Rossetti 51).<sup>7</sup> Therefore, we can assume Jane’s unique PRB dress was not worn by her alone, but other Pre-Raphaelite models.

The Pre-Raphaelite women made specific garments which were used in PRB painted works. This would have been considered an acceptable activity for women, as making costumes was within the confines of their domestic role. Millais often relied on his mother to make and design various garments for his compositions (Ormond “Millais” 26). One example of Millais’s mother Emily Mary Hodgkinson making garments for a painting is in the 1860-2 work *Ransom*. In this scene, a father pays a ransom for the release of his two kidnapped daughters (fig. 28). The costumes in this work are exquisitely detailed. Millais’s mother remembers making the garments: “most of them were made by me, and I designed them from a book on costume lent by Lady Eastlake” (qtd. in J.G. Millais 1:365).

D.G. Rossetti had Fanny Cornforth and Jane Morris make specific clothes for him to paint. In a letter from D.G. Rossetti to Jane his reliance on her ability as a designer is revealed. He writes to Jane in regards to a garment she is making for an upcoming commission:

About the blue silk dress it occurs to me to say that I think the sleeves should be as full at the top as is consistent with the outline, and perhaps would gain by being lined with some after material, but of this you will be the best judge. The pieces of gold embroidery in the front might (if you have time to make it) be something like this [Rossetti enclosed a sketch here] unless as is very possible a better idea strikes you. However it is a great pity that the last portrait (which I fancy is the one you

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<sup>7</sup> Old Clothes.

will chose) is in such a position that both this and the embroidery which you propose to put at the back will be hidden. In the front view portrait these will show to great advantage. (D.G. Rossetti 2)

The dress which D.G Rossetti refers to is depicted in the painting *The Blue Silk Dress* (fig. 11). As mentioned in Chapter 1, it was likely that Jane wore this dress after she made it for the composition.

D.G. Rossetti was not inclined to make clothes by hand as Ford Maddox Brown had. Jane Morris was an accomplished sewer and exceptional embroidery designer. Her close relationship with D.G. Rossetti fostered a co-operative design practice. Jane had the final say in the appearance of garments as Rossetti referred to her for the last word on what would look best (D.G. Rossetti 2). Often, the sources of the PRB clothing are considered to be an imaginative part of their unique vision. The women who made these clothes are often overlooked.

Women's creative contributions to design in the PRB are comparable to the reception of the female artistic work in the Arts and Craft movement. As argued by Anthea Callen and Lynne Walker, rigid sex roles dictated what creative tasks women could participate in. These tasks were often confined by stereotypes which referenced women's "limited" and "special feminine capabilities (Walker 166). Male creativity and female construction were understood as binary oppositional concepts; a man's role was to create and imagine new pictures and garments, while a woman's was to construct said garments for him. These references to Jane Morris and Millais's mother Emily Mary Hodgkinson shed light on the designer role these women had in creating the garments for the PRB's work. Although their work would have been accepted because it was considered appropriate in a female realm, their work and design made their PRB works all the more unique.

### **Chapter 3: Fashion Codes: Semiotic Functions of Dress in Pre-Raphaelite Paintings**

Pre-Raphaelites were obsessed with the depiction of dress. It preoccupied their early Brotherhood works and their subsequent artistic styles. They used dress as a way to communicate symbolic underlying meanings in their work; the costumes also communicated their social beliefs. Their interest in dress extended beyond the stereotypical understanding of Pre-Raphaelite dress which over time has become overly simplified.

In studying the clothing depicted in PRB work, we can observe their interactions with social issues of the day, including prostitution, urbanization, and dress reform. As noted in the previous chapter, the Pre-Raphaelites paid meticulous attention to the costume sources for their paintings. The garments depicted in their works were integral to their compositions. They would have felt inauthentic if the garments were not fitting the idea they were trying to convey in their works. They also used costume as a decorative device, using rich, draped fabrics and creative costumes which hinted at their interest in a new type of artistic dress.

An introduction to the nineteenth-century trope of the “fallen women” is necessary to understand the cultural production around the topic. In the 1850s, for the first time the scale of British population was weighted heavier in cities, particularly in London. Employment for women was difficult to find and there was an abundance of girls without jobs; many of these women were forced into prostitution. These women were seen as pariahs and outcasts, an erroneous perception due to the fact that in reality, these women were particularly vulnerable. Victorians became preoccupied with them, and endeavoured to find ways to easily identify them; one of the ways they did this was by looking at their clothing. As Michael Foucault has shown, the modern taxonomies emphasize minute distinctions among different types of people (Valverde 163). Victorian social scientists “categorized” different kinds of prostitutes: kept

women, independent prostitutes and those that worked in brothels. They attempted to classify not so much the actions or statements of the prostitutes but rather their social, psychological, intellectual and moral identities – as revealed in their choice of different kinds of clothes (163). The paintings *Awakening Conscience* (1853) and *Found* (1854-81) contributed to ongoing discourses which were building links between clothing, female sexuality and prostitution.

*The Awakening Conscience* (fig. 29) by William Holman Hunt depicts the Victorian subject of the “fallen woman.” The male patron sits in a gaudily decorated parlor room, toys with piano keys, and sings a tavern song. His mistress, at this moment, realizing the folly of her ways, has an epiphany and begins to ascend up from his lap. Hunt’s painting made a contribution to the discourse of the cultural reception of prostitutes from a humanitarian standpoint, heroizing the fallen woman and her possible redemption.

The woman here does not signify a professional prostitute, rather a “kept woman” or a mistress. Her clothing indicates this social status; the looseness of her dress is a sign that she has broken with convention and is living a free life (Shefer 57). Although it is daytime, she wears a night gown. Each of her fingers is bejeweled with a band, except her wedding ring finger. The light pink bowtie she wears around her neck symbolizes her adherence to an alternative lifestyle (Crane 243). In this work, there are many indicators that the rules of Victorian etiquette and propriety have been subverted (Casteras 25). Hunt painted this picture as a cautionary tale for women to follow a righteous path and refuse the temptation of becoming a fallen woman.

In a letter to the *Times*, Ruskin envisions the girl, after her conscience is awakened, compelled to leave wearing nothing but a nightgown, “at which the painter has laboured so closely, thread by thread [its] pure whiteness may be soiled with dust and rain, her outcast feet falling on the street” (qtd. in Marsh *Women* 82). Depicting the woman in a night gown layers the

work with two meanings. One, that she is a kept woman and does not need to leave the interior of the home; she has no need to wear proper clothes because her main job is to ensure the pleasure of her patron. Second, it signals her complete vulnerability; if she were to leave at the moment of “awakening” she would be viewed as an outcast, susceptible to the weather and rain without proper garments.

The shawl the woman wears around her waist is of great interest, the rich red weave contrasts against her white night gown. Generally speaking, in the mid-nineteenth century, shawls were ubiquitous. Upper-class women consumed shawls from Kashmir as well as high-quality British imitations. Bourgeois women adopted the style and bought cheaper imitations at a furious pace (Zutshi 432). Although they were common at this time, shawls were coded with symbols that alluded to social status and marriage. I argue that the shawl the woman wears in *Awakening Conscience* is a coded symbol that alludes to her position as a mistress.

Expensive Kashmiri shawls were coveted commodities, the primary purchasers of Kashmiri shawls were men, since they controlled finances within affluent families that could afford these shawls. Kashmiri shawls were a favorite nineteenth-century wedding gift (Maskiell 215). Unmarried nineteenth-century women, no matter how wealthy, were discouraged from wearing Kashmiri shawls, a manners “deportment manual” from 1863 explained that doing so would “lead people to believe they possessed an unbridled love of luxury and deprive themselves the pleasure of receiving such finery from their husband” (qtd. in Maskiell 216). Similarly, Elizabeth Gaskell’s 1850 novel *North and South* described Indian shawls as a highly desired item for the English bourgeois *trousseau* (Daly 239). The Victorian semiotic understanding of shawls was that they were a sign of luxury and marriage.

The shawl worn in *The Awakening Conscience* is a lower-priced British reproduction of a real Kashmiri shawl.<sup>8</sup> The popularity of mass-produced British shawls was at its height in the mid-nineteenth century, so it is easy to assume the shawl in *Awakening Conscience* is a reproduction shawl. The shawl was given as casual token of affection, and does not have the same coded meaning of love and devotion implied as it would have as a wedding gift. In conservative circles, accepting a gift of clothes or even money to buy clothes was a sign that you were on a path to become a fallen woman (Valverde 159). As prescribed in the matrimony manual *The Etiquette of Courtship and Matrimony* (1852), the accepting of gifts from a man who had not made a distinct proposal was inviting obligations which were viewed as unbecoming and improper (Casteras 25). Further to this, the heroine wears her shawl around the waist. In both literary and pictorial sources this is relatively rare.<sup>9</sup> Even taking into consideration she is indoors, the unconventional way she wears the shawl signifies her own alternative lifestyle.

Hunt's choices of models reflect his views on appropriate clothing women should wear. The model for the heroine was Annie Miller, a "working girl" which Hunt set out to rescue from degradation and had planned to marry (*Marsh Women* 82). Her social status as a prostitute made it acceptable for her to be depicted in costume which alluded to her immoral past. Annie's unconventional life is made clear through her eclectic outfit and irregular placement of a shawl around her waist. Hunt and Miller never married. He eventually married an upper-class woman, Fanny Waugh, in 1865. Soon after, they set off to the Middle East where Hunt hoped to paint more biblical scenes. While travelling in Florence, Waugh died after giving birth from a post-natal fever. A devastated Hunt painted *Fanny Holman Hunt* (1866-7) (fig. 30), a portrait of his

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<sup>8</sup> Replication Kashmiri shawls had been made in Britain and France since the 1770s. In the 1820's and 1830s Paisley shawls were the most popular imitation shawls. In The Great Exhibition of 1851, many British reproduction Kashmiri shawls were exhibited (Maskille 219).

<sup>9</sup> Literary sources that described shawls around the shoulders are in Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853) where she comments on the "majestic drapery" with which she adorns her "broad shoulders" (Brontë in Daly 239).

wife a year after his return to London. In this painting of his deceased love, he depicts a lavish, Kashmiri shawl which she wears around her shoulders. In this painting he shows a rich coveted shawl in its proper placement: around a wife's shoulders as a symbol of a proper woman's engagement gift. The shawl had an important semiotic function in Victorian England: to signify the marital status of the wearer. This concept is crystallized in comparing the depictions of shawls on the fallen woman in *Awakening Conscience* and on the devoted wife *Fanny Holman Hunt*.

The shawl depicted in Rossetti's *Found* (1854-1881) (fig. 31) is also worn by a fallen woman. It is not a Kashmiri or even a British made imitation, but seeing a prostitute wearing such a textile on the street would have shocked the audience. The Kashmiri shawl was a clear signifier of social status, seeing a prostitute wear such a fine garment would temporarily unsettle the system of class markers, hence why the shawl is a gaudy reproduction (Daly 238).

The subject of Rossetti's *Found* is more severe and pessimistic in how it depicts the fallen woman who is an ashamed, professional prostitute. The scene in the painting is set at dawn, a young countryman has travelled to the city to sell a calf and sees his former sweetheart. She has become a city prostitute; she sinks to her knees in shame of her immoral life at the sight of her former love. The costume depicted in *Found* is one of Rossetti's few attempts to paint contemporary dress. Rossetti drew many studies for this work, and abandoned it many times, indicating that he may have had trouble planning the composition and clothing (Ormond 26).

While planning the composition, Rossetti wrote a letter to his assistant Treffy Dunn regarding the clothing for the female character, "the woman should wear something in a pinkish tinge... Also a mantle of some sort-- pretty showy, but seedy" (qtd. in Ormond "Dress" 26). The "showy clothes" or "fine clothes" Rossetti refers to were associated with prostitution. The girl in

*Found* wears a costume of a sprigged gown and shawl enhanced with a fine silk bonnet and an ornamental ostrich feather. This extravagance outfit signifies that she is a prostitute; the fancy city clothes she wears sharply contrasts the man's country working clothes of a smock and gaiters.

A key semiotic division in Victorian fashion was between "honest dress" and "the love of finery." "Honest dress" was clothing an upstanding woman would wear; it exemplified her inner, pure, sincere character on the outside. This contrasts the prostitutes' "love of finery," whose wearing of fancy clothes was a signifier of immoral, seductive ways. The phrase "love of finery" and the related arguments that women's sartorial vanity caused moral and financial decline into prostitution were popular in literary, political, and even scientific discourses. The desire for fancy clothes was seen as a lure for young servant girls who wanted to dress in more elegant clothes than were dictated by their lower social rank.<sup>10</sup> Rossetti's sensitivity to these underlying cultural discourses is revealed in *Found*.

The woman in *Found* is not wearing a crinoline. This absence comes from the idea of the "good crinoline." These categories were set out by the Victorian Londoner, Henry Mayhew (1812-1887) who described dress worn by prostitutes.<sup>11</sup> Crinolines were worn underneath clothing and therefore, you could not be accused of being boastful of your fine expensive clothes. This shifted attention away from the showing of finery, to unseen good quality underwear (Valverde 164). In other words you could have good, expensive underwear and not show it off in a way that would allude to a love of finery. Although Mayhew championed the

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<sup>10</sup> For working servants this was a great annoyance, heads of the house dictated the types of plain clothing servants wore. Furthermore, cast-off old clothing that was no longer worn by their masters could not be worn either. There is a lot of evidence suggesting that employers often discussed servants misplaced "love of finery" as well (Valverde 166).

<sup>11</sup> Henry Mayhew was an English social researcher, writer and supporter of reform. His book *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851) was about the lower classes of London and provided extensive commentary on prostitutes and their clothing (Valverde 164-5).



crinoline for reasons of morality, the PRB disliked the garments for its unnatural imposition on the body. They preferred showing the true form of the body. The crinoline also imposed significant restrictions to female movement. This restriction of movement was opposed by the Pre-Raphaelites and subsequent dress reform movements. For example, as written in the *Rational Dress Society Gazette* in 1888, they proclaimed:

The Rational Dress Society protests against the introduction of any fashion in dress that either deforms the figure, impedes the movements of the body, or in any way tends to injure the health... of heavily-weighted skirts, as rendering healthy exercise almost impossible...It protests against crinolines or crinolettes of any kind as ugly and deforming... (*The Rational Dress Society's Gazette* 1)

Although this quotation is from years after the height of Pre-Raphaelite dress, the discourses on restrictive dress they began influenced later dress reform movements. Just as the Pre-Raphaelites viewed the crinoline as cumbersome and restrictive, so did the *Rational Dress Society*.

In *Found*, a crinoline would have made the heroine's position impossible. Her movement is a meaningful part of the work, collapsing after seeing her lost love. Her movement exposes her as a complex character whose mental state of self-consciousness, self-questioning, and self-loathing is overpowering. Gestural movements in the paintings reveal that the PRB did not favour depicting the crinoline. In both *Found* and *Awakening Conscience*, the women are shifting in ways which would not be possible wearing a cage crinoline.

The crinoline cage was associated with Victorian ideals concerning the feminine body. The female body in a voluminous skirt signified a "woman" (Entwistle 141). Gender roles were communicated through dress, which contributed to the commodification of the female body. In other words, the crinoline functioned as a "reminder to men of their own superior mobility and to

women of the restraint and passivity supposedly inherent in their sex” (Roberts 176). The Pre-Raphaelites’ subversion of these rigid gender codes, even when depicting fallen women in their paintings, exemplifies distaste for cumbersome modern dress and suppressive fashionable clothing.

Another reason for the PRB’s rejection of the crinoline in painting comes from the writing of John Ruskin. He thought that all aspects of painting should be true to nature and his advice extended to dress. He commented on historical costumes depicted in paintings:

No good historical painting ever existed or ever could or ever can exist, where the dress of the people of the same time are not beautiful; and had it not been for the lovely and fantastic dressing of the thirteenth to the fifteen centuries neither French nor Florentine nor Venetian art could have risen to anything like the rank it reached. (qtd. in Cunningham 105)

Generally, the costumes Ruskin refers to are of the flowing, medieval type which shows the natural lines of the body. Ruskin also believed that the best dresses were not the most expensive; rather their beauty lay in the arrangement of simple and beautiful “masses of colour.” “Masses of colour” describes loose, draped, garments, the antitheses of the stiff crinoline cage. The paintings of the PRB, particularly those of the three founding members Holman Hunt, Rossetti, and Millais, depicted clothing that could reveal the bodies’ natural forms (Cunningham 105). This was accomplished by avoiding such fashions as the crinoline.

The fallen woman, a trope which was a symptom of the times, contrasted the dress depicted in medieval subjects. In protest against steamships, railroads, textile factories, and lost religion, the PRB rediscovered and recreated the Middle Ages. These ideas were drawn from tales of chivalry and romance, and they used medieval garments to illustrate their dreamy ideal

(Marsh *Women* 93). Nineteenth-century medievalism had two key defining aspects: naturalism, which in this sense meant simpler types of sentiment and heroic codes of action in both nature and in the past, and feudalism, which was seen nostalgically to offer a harmonious, stable social structure (Bryden 30).

There was a nineteenth-century interest in making the past real in tangible ways, making the material dimensions of history more immediate for the viewer. In turn, painters, particularly the Pre-Raphaelites, developed styles of displaying clothing for audience consumption. The study of costume had been associated with the study of cultural customs and social function (Bryden 32). The depictions of medieval scenes and dress were an attempt to bring Victorian medievalism alive.

The PRB painted medieval dress as a way to access this idealized version of historical life. In William Morris's *La Belle Iseult* (1858) (fig. 19) model Jane Morris is depicted wearing medieval costume. This type of early medieval clothes were draped and not tailored; rather than distorting the body, they fell into loose shapes and folds. In Millais's *Mariana* the dress worn by the model is an obvious example of medievalism (fig. 7). The appeal of the medieval era lay partly in the opportunity to employ rich colours which were not ubiquitous in mid-nineteenth-century dress (Ormond "Dress" 26). The rich blue colour of her dress references medieval manuscripts which used *lapis lazuli* to colour garments. The dark blue colour exemplifies the PRB's interest in medieval colour symbolism. Colour symbolism was used to represent emotional states (Bryden 33). In the case of *Mariana*, who cannot be married because her dowry was lost at sea, the blue signifies misery, loneliness, and loss.

Along with the benefit of painting unrestricted bodies, PRB painting depicts emotional encounters between the sexes where undertones of correct dress for the sexes are evident. In

Elizabeth Siddall's sketch, *The Lady of Shalott* (1853) (fig. 32), a woman is shown at work in a light, airy interior. Her long plain gown and unadorned hair symbolize her purity and propriety. In Rossetti's *Before the Battle* (1858) (fig. 33), a woman wears a red cotehardie and kirtle and attaches a pennon to her favoured knight's spear. The crowded background populated by men and women of the court are separated by masculine and feminine realms; women are shown spinning, carding, and weaving whilst men ride off to jousting tournaments wearing the tokens made by their ladies (Marsh *Women* 99).

In Rossetti's paintings, medieval sleeves had an association with lovers' unity and binding. This references the ritual where ladies tied their sleeves as a token to their beloved knights' lance before battle, and the action implied the continuance between lovers. Rossetti painted a medieval damsel tying her love token of green sleeves on her knight's helmet in *My Lady Greensleeves* (1859) (Yamaguchi 17) (fig. 34). In *Sir Lancelot in the Queen's Chamber* (1857), Guinevere's costume precedes Rossetti's interest which he employed in many pictures of the early 1860s (fig.14). Victorian reformers of design, such as Gottfried Semper, linked primitiveness with exotic craft traditions, and the connection with medievalism and exoticism produced the alluring associations through the use of decoration. Guinevere's exotic sleeves made of peacock feathers and ecstatic facial expression allude to the implication of medieval romance and desire (Yamaguchi 17).

Rossetti made many attempts, particularly in his later work, to display exotic dress which was linked to ideas about exotic craft traditions and Orientalism. In his work *The Beloved* (1865) (fig. 35), Rossetti experimented with atypical costume, this time with a Japanese dress. The model Marie Ford raises her arms to adjust her headdress which shows the elaborate embroidery on the sleeves. The ornate headdress is also exotic (Ormond "Dress" 28). Rossetti was fascinated

by Japanese and Chinese objects; he collected blue and white K'ang china along with clothes and textiles. This interest was part of a larger societal trend with a preoccupation in Asian and Middle Eastern countries which is known as Orientalism. Theorist Edward Said explained that Orientalism was a way Western culture saw Middle and Far Eastern cultures. Orientalism is characterized by the Euro-centric tendency to fetishize and mythologize different cultures. Alongside England's consumption of Indian shawls, fashionable citizens wanted to consume images of the exotic east. *The Beloved* (1865-6) is one of Rossetti's attempts to portray this cultural interest and display it in his own creative way.

Rossetti's *Roman Widow* (1873) (fig. 36) was painted in the last artistic phase of his career and is characterized by romantic, idealized depictions of women. The painting was inspired by Greco-Roman culture and illustrates the dichotomy of life and death. The scene shown is a solemn Roman mortuary rite (Bentley 62). When Rossetti was planning the composition, the costume and drapery were intended to be a focus of the canvas. From the 1860s onward, Rossetti's letters begin to refer to his draperies as an important part of his entire conception (Ormond "Dress" 28). In correspondence to the patron, Frederick Leyland, Rossetti explains the image he is planning: a widow wearing white, the symbolic colour of mourning in Rome. He boasts, "I think it is one of my best & indeed shows advance: I should like to have shown you the classical drapery of which it very chiefly consists" (qtd. in Bentley 60). The drapery is devised from a single piece of fabric which was draped over the model, Alexa Wilding's body. There are no visible seams and the garment lacks observable construction. The widow's headdress was comprised of a piece of "Indian muslin" which was sent from Treffy Dunn in Cheyne Walk. The marriage girdle was also likely painted from a material object

(Bentley 62). The care with which Rossetti selected and requested materials and objects attests to his desire to make the painting both aesthetically pleasing and realistic.

The mourning wife has placed her wedding girdle on the funerary urn that contains her husband's ashes. The wedding girdle was not a direct quotation of Roman culture; rather wedding girdles were customary in Renaissance Florence and referenced the Roman goddess of love. The belt was known as a "girdle of Venus," and was believed to endow the bride with grace, beauty, and love. It was also a symbol of the bride's virginity, which she preserved for her husband and which remained intact until the consummation of the marriage (Kishner 89). Placing this sacred wedding object over her husband's ashes signifies her broken bond with love. Rossetti's allusion to the Renaissance tradition of a wedding girdle exemplifies his interest in symbolic dress and historicism.

To Rossetti, the body and the face were spiritualized through the agency of love and passion. One of the results of this belief was his depiction of uncovered and loosely dressed bodies which in the mid-nineteenth century was conventional. In the *Roman Widow*, instead of focusing on depictions of the face and head which was common in contemporary paintings, Rossetti included more of the torso as well as exaggerating the erogenous zones of the mouth, hands, and neck (Casteras 29).

The flowing drapery and intentional looseness of the garment in *The Roman Widow* relates to a vein of dress reform which cited classical body types seen in statues as reason to reject corsets. The dress reformer Dr. Combe wrote:

The statue of Venus exhibits the natural shape, which is recognized by artists and persons of cultivated taste as the most beautiful which the female figure can assume. Misled... women of fashion, and their countless frocks of

imitations...have gradually come to regard a narrow or spiderwaist as an ornament worthy of attainment at any cost of sacrifice. (qtd. in Cunningham 121)

The classical body was viewed as healthy, authentic, and beautiful. Only a few years later, the painter George Frederic Watts, who was associated with the PRB circle, wrote about the female body. He cited the importance for ancient Greek dress especially on a “well draped young body”; he believed that a preference for the corseted waist was a sign of societal retrogression (qtd. in Cunningham 121). Dress reformers, in an attempt to further their cause, would use artistic arguments about natural beauty. Similarly, reformers often referenced a classical standard of beauty to solidify their arguments against tight lacing (Cunningham 121). The excessive looseness in the drapery worn by the *The Roman Widow* is a contribution to contemporary dress reform discourses concerning the classical shape of the female body.

Another convincing argument against the corseted waist came from later debates that alluded to PRB paintings. A contributor to the publication *Knowledge* ten years after *Roman Widow* cites the “artistic mind” as having intrinsic knowledge to where the natural waist should be. The writer R.A. Proctor explained:

The corseted spoiled waist does not err in being out of proportion, but in being deformed. It is not merely the *simplicity* of the natural waist that is wanting, but all the curves which a well-shaped waist possesses... a corset-made waist is sheer discord to the artistic mind. (qtd. in Cunningham 122)

Advocates of healthy and artistic dress looked to the PRB, and works such as *Roman Widow* to support their arguments for discarding the corset.

In Rossetti’s *Monna Rosa* (1867) (fig. 37), he illustrates an idealistic, romantic rendition of Aesthetic dress. Hunt explained that the PRB were not surprised when “Rossetti enlarged

upon the devising of ladies' dresses..." (Hunt 1:151). This creative sartorial tendency comes to its zenith in *Monna Rosa*. The model, Mrs. Frances Leyland, is draped in a piece of eighteenth-century brocaded fabric.<sup>12</sup> This dress with full sleeves ruched at the wrists and with a gathered neckline was skillfully draped. The garment is not constructed with seams; rather, Rossetti tucked and pinned the fabric into place creating the loose, flowing form. Interestingly, the shape of the costume precedes the fashionable styles of the early 1870s, when the crinoline was discarded (Newton 34). These changes in contemporary dress must have come as a welcome surprise for Rossetti who saw the design of clothes as a reflection of at least some aspects of the society which produces it. Rossetti's depictions of dress had a lasting effect on the Aesthetic Movement; examples such as *Monna Rosa* confirm this contribution. This rendering enabled Rossetti to represent Mrs. Leyland in a way that illustrated his refined sartorial taste as well as her status as an example of an artistic beauty.

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<sup>12</sup> The piece of brocaded fabric is seen in various Rossetti paintings and presumably belonged to him (Newton 34). One of the paintings is *Lucrezia Borgia* (1871) (Faxon 153). In the 1871 picture, the garment is more structured.



## Chapter 4: The Sartorial Legacy of the Pre-Raphaelites

The Pre-Raphaelites inspired a number of artists and artistic movements. The movement has an obvious beginning in 1848, yet its influence seems to have no determinate endpoint; it may even be traced into the twentieth-century work of such artists as Eleanor Fortescue Brickdale or John Byam Liston Shaw (Prettejohn *Aestheticism* 3). The dress worn by Pre-Raphaelites also had a long-lasting effect on clothing both depicted in paintings and worn by women in artistic circles. The eclectic, naturalistic type of dress worn by the women of the PRB was highly original and represents the first artistic dress movement in the nineteenth century. Such originality attracts followers and extends out of the original purpose of Pre-Raphaelite dress. The unique depictions of PRB dress influenced painters and whole artistic groups such as Aesthetes, and even practitioners within the Arts and Craft movement. Within these later movements, ideas about natural beauty and the idealization of the past were born out of Pre-Raphaelitism.

The elaborate and beautiful dress the PRB worked so hard to create influenced later painters' depictions of costume. Examples can be seen in the works of artists such as Byam Shaw, Simeon Solomon, and John William Waterhouse. The aesthetic painter Lord Frederic Leighton was one of the first artists to be associated with the aesthetic motto "art for art's sake." Leighton was influenced by many aspects of Pre-Raphaelite art. Like Rossetti, Leighton was fascinated by modeled drapery on classical statues. Leighton believed modern dress was "imposed by the tailor" on an artist, and therefore, fashionable dress was excluded from true art. Elizabeth Prettejohn convincingly argues that some of Leighton's ideas may have been derived from the philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's *Aesthetics* (1835). Hegel theorized that

classical drapery allowed for the expression of the human spirit through the body (Prettejohn *Aestheticism* 138). Hegel explains his theories about drapery and modern tailoring:

What constitutes the ideal in clothing is the determining principle displayed when the outer wholly and entirely subserves the changeable expression of spirit appearing in the body, with the result that the particular form of the drapery, the fall of the folds, their hanging and lifting is entirely regulated from within, and is adapted to precisely this pose or movement momentarily only. In our modern dress, on the other hand, the whole of the material is fashioned once for all, cut and sewn to fit the shape of the limbs, so that the dress's freedom to fall exists no longer, or hardly at all. After all, the character of the folds is determined the stitching, and in general, the cut and fall of the garment is produced technically and mechanically by the tailor. (qtd. in Prettejohn *Aestheticism* 138)

Leighton's fascination with modelling is most obvious in his later work. His work *Flaming June* (1895) exemplifies this interest (fig. 38). The aura of the idealized classical beauty is tangible as she is depicted asleep on a hot summer's day by the sea. Leighton's attempt to represent the figure's spirit through the modelling of elaborate drapery is obvious, her languid body position is echoed in the soft delicate folds of her garment. Yet, as Hegel says, this drapery is ephemeral; if the woman moves her body the drapery will never look the same way again, making this painted moment all the more beautiful. The portion of canvas the sleeping beauty occupies is reminiscent of the Rossetti's later works depicting classical and allegorical female characters. *Flaming June* shows a different kind of beauty, more innocent and subdued than Rossetti's later overtly sexualized femmes. That said, both Rossetti and Leighton use dramatic modelling derived from classical sources to depict their idealized beauties.

In the nineteenth century, a pastime for middle and upper class individuals was recording their thoughts and reactions to many aspects of their lives in journals or letters. The eclectic way the PRB women dressed was a source of interest for these writers. Investigating a few instances of firsthand accounts of PRB dress reveals opposing reactions; there are those who thought the dress was ugly and unfashionable, and those who idolized the unique mode of dress.

One observer of May and Jane Morris at a ball had a less than sympathetic view of their dress. In her diary entry for November 1, 1883, Jeanette Marshall, the daughter of John Marshall, a long-time friend and medical advisor to Rossetti and Maddox Brown, recorded a judgemental description of Jane and May Morris' clothing:

Mrs. Morris and her second daughter May were there, and the former looked very well, I thought, though very sloppy in a cream crepe, sparingly turned with old gold satin, and made high at the throat. Her hair was fuzzy, and she had a white Indian shawl over her shoulders... The daughter, in a brown-red bedgown with no tucker... (qtd. in Radcliffe 311)

Clearly Mrs. Marshall did not approve of the distinctive kind of dress worn by the Morris women. Jane's costume was referred to as "sloppy," which may refer to the draped silhouette the Pre-Raphaelite women preferred. Her cream crepe, a colour the Pre-Raphaelites favoured in fashion, was only "sparingly turned" with gold satin, in Mrs. Marshall's opinion Jane's outfit was unadorned compared to fashionable dress. Referring to May's dress as a bedgown hints that it may have been loose and corset-free. The unfavourable description suggests that the garment she wears was received as casual and not appropriate for the formal occasion of a ball.

Marshall continues her objection of Pre-Raphaelites dressers when she visits them in their home. After a stay at Maddox Brown's residence she complains, "the flood of 'artistics' in

everything hideous in the way of costume was appalling” (qtd. in Cunningham 115). She often referred to Pre-Raphaelite women in their homes dressed as “sloppy” and in her harshest words “witch-like” (115). Her use of the term “witch-like” certainly refers to the frizzy unbound hair Jane Morris preferred. Obviously, the more relaxed fashion the PRB women wore in their homes was deemed as inappropriate as their outerwear. Mrs. Marshall’s reactions exemplified the late-nineteenth-century self-consciousness concerning fashion. Ironically, Mrs. Marshall eventually adopted some subdued aspects of artistic dress such as boneless corsets and wearing Liberty silks (115).

The dress of the PRB was not always judged so harshly. Rather, it was often held up on a sartorial pedestal. Before Jenette Marshall made snide comments about the Morris’ dresses in 1861, Mary Howitt described a crush (a “private view” of an exhibition, for a select number of people) and the women who populated the gallery:

The uncrinolined women, with their wild hair, which was very beautiful, the picturesque dresses and rich coloring, looks like figures out of the pre-Raphaelite pictures... They seemed also young and kindred to each other, that I felt as if I were out of my place, though I admire them all. (qtd. in Radcliffe 311)

These women were appreciated for their association with elite artistic circles, which were viewed as exotic and bohemian. The very attributes scorned by some of those in fashionable circles were adored by others. Instead of using negative words, Howitt refers to their hair as “wild” conjuring up ideas of romance and lust. Richly coloured dresses were described as “picturesque,” in other words, innately beautiful. In such a society, it was a rare and sought-after accomplishment to be called a Pre-Raphaelite beauty.

Some of the most fascinating interpretations of Pre-Raphaelite dress are found in literary works. Aesthetes shared the artistic and rational approach to dress that had been addressed by the Pre-Raphaelite artists. This is made clear through the writings of such diverse writers as William Morris and his daughter May; Oscar Wilde and his wife Lucy Wilde; Walter and Lucy Crane; Lord Leighton; George Frederic Watts; and Edward Godwin (Cunningham 116). One of the most prolific and influential of these writers was Mrs. Mary Eliza Joy Haweis. She wrote books and articles over a decade after the Pre-Raphaelites started wearing their unique type of dress. This reveals the influence Pre-Raphaelite dress had on the popular imagination. In other words, the Pre-Raphaelites were trendsetters, and the first to wear their type of clothing. Only ten years after, late-adopters were interested in dressing in this unique way, and they looked to the writings of Mrs. Haweis for instruction. Two of her books *Art of Beauty* (1878) and *Art of Dress* (1879) discuss women's dress. Haweis praised Pre-Raphaelite dress in terms of colour choice, adoption of historical details, and the way in which it challenged standard beauty and fashion codes. As Haweis rightly explained, "the Pre-Raphaelite defies fashion whenever it is bad, but she always goes along with it if it mends in ways and becomes good" (*Dress* 107).

During the late nineteenth century, even Mrs. Haweis, a tastemaker, fashion writer, and costume critic, could not pin down exactly what made up Pre-Raphaelite dress. She asked, "what is meant by Pre-Raphaelitism in dress?" She answered with, "if one were required to furnish an exact definition of that term it would be very hard; for everyone who catches it up means a different thing" (*Dress* 98). In her text, she generalizes by explaining that the name of Pre-Raphaelite dress is spreading, the movement first taken up by those in artistic circles, and the chief goal is to combat the extravagances and ugliness in contemporary fashionable dress (98).

Mrs. Haweis identifies the types of dress ladies should adopt in order to be the most beautiful. She begins with shape, which she calls out as a defining feature of Pre-Raphaelite dress. She explains, “the first goal is to have an antique waist...because the proportion of the figure, the grace of action and carriage, depend so much on the waist being the right size, it is impossible to preach too strongly against the folly and ugliness of tight lacing” (*Dress* 101-102). Haweis is adamant about the rejection of the corset and other garments that may restrict the body’s movement. She selectively references other aspects of Pre-Raphaelite dress which support her argument. She describes the type of skirt worn by Pre-Raphaelite women: “her skirt can be cut full or scant as she chooses, but is never tied to her legs with strings or elastics. She can, therefore stoop without gasping or cracking her corset-bone, and can sit down or walk upstairs at will, unlike some votaries of present fashion (*Dress* 102).

Freedom of movement, for Haweis was an imperative aspect of dress. She describes a popular skirt type in the 1870s, which was, “tied to her legs with strings” (*Dress* 102). This type of skirt was very narrow and was tethered to the legs with thread or elastics, and greatly restricted movement. Although the type of skirt was not popular during the original period of Pre-Raphaelite dress, Haweis references it as though she assumes they would forego this restrictive type of dress. In this instance, she appropriates Pre-Raphaelite dress and its loose fitting style to prove her point about freedom of movement in current fashions. Similarly, she discusses this in her section about sleeves, citing that fashionable sleeves are restrictive, but those of the Pre-Raphaelites allow for more freedom of movement. She favoured types of sleeves which were puffed from the shoulder to the wrist: slashed; long and hanging to the ground; or open with small under-sleeves of a different colour. These sleeve types are seen in PRB paintings, and Haweis includes illustrations of some of these sleeve types in *Art of Dress* (fig.

39). In Haweis's figure labelled "Twelfth-Century," the same sleeve type is seen in Rossetti's sketch *Guinevere* (1848) (fig. 21). Mrs. Haweis challenges her readers to ask their dressmakers to add one of the aforementioned sleeves to their gowns, saying that the seamstress would find such atypical sleeves hideous! (*Dress* 103). This statement suggests the type of sleeves worn and depicted by the Pre-Raphaelites were still unfavoured by the fashionable majority. Haweis continues that Pre-Raphaelite women picked appropriate walking dresses, and only wore bonnets of the shape they wanted. She encouraged the use of soft materials instead of stiff ones. She suggested tying hair with ribbons, in a medieval revival hair arrangement which she claimed as "properly Pre-Raphaelite" (120). She even recommended (if you had the right shape of head) frizzing your tresses as a flattering hairstyle (123).

Haweis explained to "plain girls" that the depictions of women by the PRB elevate their less conventional type of plainness into beauty:

Those dear and much abused Pre-Raphaelite painters, whom it is still in some circles the fashion to decry, are the plain girls' best friends. They have taken all the neglected ones by the hand. All the ugly flowers, all the ugly buildings, all the ugly faces, they have shown us have a certain crooked beauty of their own, entirely apart from the oddness which supplies the place of actual beauty sometimes, and is almost as attractive. (*Beauty* 274)

She explained pretty girls were at a loss; when they grow old and lose their beauty, they would have nothing but to mourn its loss, while plain girls can flourish in their soberer hues. This advice reveals that women who look like those depicted in PRB paintings were still considered "plain" or "ugly," but that new unconventional ideas about beauty were spreading. Haweis proclaimed, "now is the time for the plain women. Only dress after the Pre-Raphaelite style, and

you will be astonished to find from being an ugly duckling you are a full-fledged swan!” (*Beauty* 274).

It is clear that clothing depicted in Pre-Raphaelite paintings served as one source for women who desired to dress in the artistic manner in the late 1870s and 1880s. The Grosvenor Gallery, established in 1877, was the recognized center of Aesthetic circles.<sup>13</sup> One of the reasons the Grosvenor Gallery was so popular was that it exhibited paintings which depicted types of Pre-Raphaelite dress. Special kinds of dress that were depicted in Burne-Jones’s paintings, the socialite and Aesthetic dresser Mrs. Jopling explains, “that man of genius, Burne-Jones exhibition there, and his pictures became all the rage. Fashion, always ready to adopt anything new, set all the town wild to copy the dress and attitudes of his wonderful nymphs (qtd. in Gere 50).

These followers of Pre-Raphaelite dress adored the way Burne-Jones painted clothes, and they would copy designs directly from his paintings. Aesthetes commissioned their dressmakers to duplicate such gowns so they could be worn in public to future artistic events. *The Mill* (1882), one of Burne-Jones’s paintings exhibited at the Grosvenor, influenced how Aesthetes wore clothing (fig. 40). In the early 1890s, Aesthetes began to publish their ideas about dress in the magazine *Aglaia: The Journal of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union*. The dresses depicted in their first issue look similar in to the work of Burne-Jones, the looseness of clothing, free flowing drapery, and classically high waist exemplify the influence of Burne-Jones’s Grosvenor Gallery paintings (fig. 41).

The Pre-Raphaelites and Aesthetes shared many ideals. The main sartorial concern for both movements was asserting an oppositional, individualistic appearance through beautiful,

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<sup>13</sup> The Grosvenor Gallery, founded by Sir Coutts and Lady Lindsay in 1877 became the center of the Aesthetic Movement. It was founded under the supposition that the Royal Academy did not support young, oppositional artists. Sir Coutts invited progressive artists to show their work, members of both the Pre-Raphaelite and Aesthetic movement were well represented: Burne-Jones, Millais, G.F. Watts, Albert Moore Whistler, Walter Crane and Fredric Leighton were some of those chosen (Radcliffe 217).



artistic dress. By the 1880s, the Aesthetic dress movement crystallized these ideas; they dressed in a way which distinguished them from the machine-made masses (Schaffer 104). Many of these women continued to support the views of the Pre-Raphaelites and the philosophies of Ruskin and Morris (Cunningham 109). Advice in Morris's lectures influenced the Aesthetic movement and their mode of dress; in 1882 he proclaimed, "simplicity of taste, that is, a love for sweet and lofty things, is of all matter necessary for birth of the new and better art we crave..." (qtd. in Radcliffe 214). Moreover, both the Pre-Raphaelites and the Aesthetes encouraged a union of the arts. In addition to reforming dress, they wished to improve all aspects of the arts. Rossetti wrote poems to accompany painted works. Burne-Jones designed windows and subjects for tapestries. Similarly, the Aesthetic painter James McNeill Whistler designed the interior of *The Peacock Room* for patron Fredrick Leyland and architects Philip Webb and E.W. Godwin designed furniture (217).

Identifying direct influences of Pre-Raphaelite dress on the wider Aesthetic movement is a difficult task. For the purpose of this chapter, I highlight general aspects of dress that Aesthetes borrowed from the PRB. Similarities shared between the Pre-Raphaelites and the Aesthetics are many. They both favoured supple, drapable fabrics. They chose colours which would have been received as unconventional, "odd red, amber yellow, peacock blue, and dull green" (Cunningham 113). The full puffed sleeve which is seen in many PRB works also appears in depictions of Aesthetic dress. The magazine *Punch* published many satires of fashion; in this one of Aesthetic dress, sleeves are shown exceptionally large and puffed (fig. 42). Dresses were worn without petticoats, crinolines, or bustles and to the fashionable viewer would have appeared as limp and drooping. The corset was discarded and the waist was either in a slightly high or natural in its

placement (113). Both types of dress featured embroidery and smocking. They chose loose designs which had smocking at the neck, wrist, and waist (114).

In many ways, the gowns called artistic dresses and teagowns were similar to house gowns, which were meant for use in the privacy of the home. The differences between gowns worn in or out of the home often depended on the quality of fabric, the degree of lining, and amount of decoration. An important difference as noted by Patricia Cunningham was “artist dress styles were worn in public, perhaps though only by the more daring aesthetic types” (114) (fig. 43). While Aesthetic dressers had their dressmakers copy the gowns depicted in the PRB paintings to wear to public functions, it is also true that professional designers such as Worth et Cie and Grace et Cie picked up on the idea and adopted the Pre-Raphaelite style for the tea-gown which by the late-nineteenth century had become a very fashionable item. In this example of Artistic dress, fashion truly did copy Pre-Raphaelite art (114).

The Arts and Crafts movement has firmly set roots in the PRB. Two of the Arts and Crafts movement founders were William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones. The goal of this movement was to further the status of hand-made goods such as furniture and textiles among a wider audience. They loathed the Royal Academy for only showcasing paintings (Parry 9). What links the Arts and Crafts movement to the Pre-Raphaelites most clearly is its emulation of the idealized middle ages (Schaffer 7). Other members of the PRB eventually turned away from the Middle Ages looking to new sources for their paintings, but Burne-Jones and Morris continued to design in a way which followed their medieval ideal.

The Arts and Crafts movement sought to cultivate traditional medieval craftsmanship. Members of the Arts and Craft movement often employed uncomplicated forms and consistently referred to motifs from the Middle Ages, such as ornate flowers and peacocks; *Peacock and*

*Dragon* (1878) is an example of this medievalism (fig. 44). The Arts and Crafts movement was organized in guilds; they employed this system because it replicated the medieval guild system which was the way trade society and commerce was organized during that time in Europe. Morris's idealistic view of medieval society is seen in his attempts to recreate this model in his design firm Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. (1861-1875) and subsequently Morris & Co (1875-1940). His understanding of aesthetic appreciation was built on ideas of "collaboration" and "community," which in turn were seen as founded on an aesthetic education achieved through authentic work (Petts 42). These ideas about the working man directly opposed capitalist-industrialism. Morris was a practicing Marxist, and he proclaimed:

He must be allowed to think of what he is doing, and to vary his work as the circumstances of it vary, and his own moods. . . . He must have a voice. . . . Such a man I should call, not an operative, but a workman. You may call him an artist if you will, for I have been describing the qualities of artists as I know them. (qtd. in Petts 34)

The Pre-Raphaelites' distaste for industry and mass-production came to a zenith in the Arts and Crafts movement and Morris's Marxism. Although some of Morris's ideas were fueled by revolutionary ideas of socialism and Marxism, they were still grounded in Romantic, Pre-Raphaelite medievalism. Morris's comparison of the simple beauty of the medieval past with what he saw as corrupt and polluted world of the present redoubled this revolutionary and artistic fervour (Barringer 52). Morris built a movement based on the medieval ideal which had its roots firmly set in Pre-Raphaelitism.

### **Conclusion: Pre-Raphaelite Dress and Authenticity**

The Pre-Raphaelites were the first artistic dress reformers. In their desire to dress in a way that aligned with their credo “truth to nature,” they were successful in creating an entirely different way of dressing. The Pre-Raphaelites used dress as a way to communicate their oppositional ideas about Victorian art and culture. The nineteenth century urban, industrialized culture and all that came with it, pollution, over-crowding and poverty, all made the Pre-Raphaelites scorn the present and look to the past. They used romantic medievalism as a talisman to ward off the dismal present. Restrictive Victorian dress was a part of this culture, and they sought to reform it through historicism.

Similarly, dressing differently was integral to their ideas about authenticity. As with art, dress was something that could be improved upon. With their artistic ideas, they would create dress just as they would paint, design, or write. Pre-Raphaelites wanted to live an authentic creative existence, and designing new styles of dress was integral to this ambition. This new type of dress was met with polarized reactions. It was either loved or hated. The very attributes scorned by some of those in fashionable circles were adored by others.

The dress Pre-Raphaelites depicted in paintings was original. Pre-Raphaelites avoided painting fashionable nineteenth-century dress; they looked to historical sources and took great care in painting distinctive garments. Early in the movement they recognized that clothing from earlier periods, when placed on a female figure, would easily reveal the shape of the body underneath, and similarly, they often depicted their own unique kind of dress. Pre-Raphaelite dresses were designed, sewn, and worn by the Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood. Their original designs are too often co-opted into the completed creative work painted by the PRB. Their creative

designs and garments contributed to the uniqueness of the Pre-Raphaelitism, and all other subsequent dress reform movements.

Interest in the Pre-Raphaelites is becoming more widespread. The many books and shows such as the BBC's *Desperate Romantics* (2010) are evidence of this. They have been framed as idealistic Bohemians whose artistic temperaments were preoccupied with romantic liaisons. Various contemporary fashion publications have borrowed the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic to lend a moody feel to fashion shoots. In the December 2011 issue of *Vogue*, the Pre-Raphaelites and their style served as inspiration for the shoot *Cult of Beauty* with photos by Steven Meisel. Millais's *Ophelia* (fig. 22) is evoked in the model's body position and vacant gaze (fig. 45). In the photo, Ophelia is not submerged in water, but rather, lays in a drained fountain. The shimmering blues and greens of her sequined gown mimic the water in Millais's original. In another photo, the chief signifier of a Pre-Raphaelite stunner, red, flowing hair is exaggerated and frizzed to exemplify her as a Pre-Raphaelite (fig. 46). Her dress is loose and not tightly fitted, but draped loosely to show the model's body, a true modern interpretation of Pre-Raphaelite dress. The Pre-Raphaelite dress and their beautiful depictions of costume continue to influence current fashion. Just as the Pre-Raphaelites were influenced by historical dress, we look to them and their dress for sartorial inspiration.

## Appendix: Figures

### Chapter 1: Pre-Raphaelite Dress: Natural, Artistic Fashion



Fig. 1. John Parson posed by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Jane Morris* (1865)



Fig. 2. John Parson posed by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Jane Morris* (1865)



Fig. 3. John Everett Millais, *Apple Blossoms (Spring)* (1856-8)

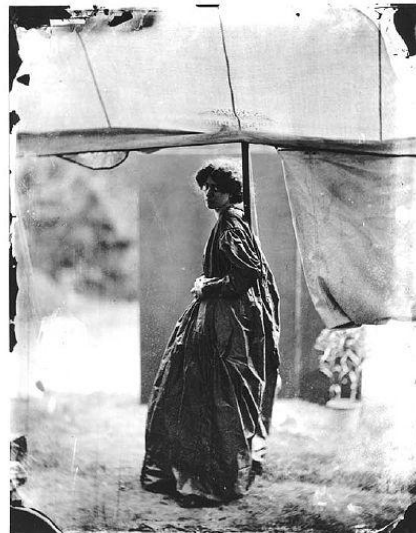


Fig. 4. John Parson posed by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Jane Morris* (1865)





Fig.5 John Parson posed by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Jane Morris* (1865)

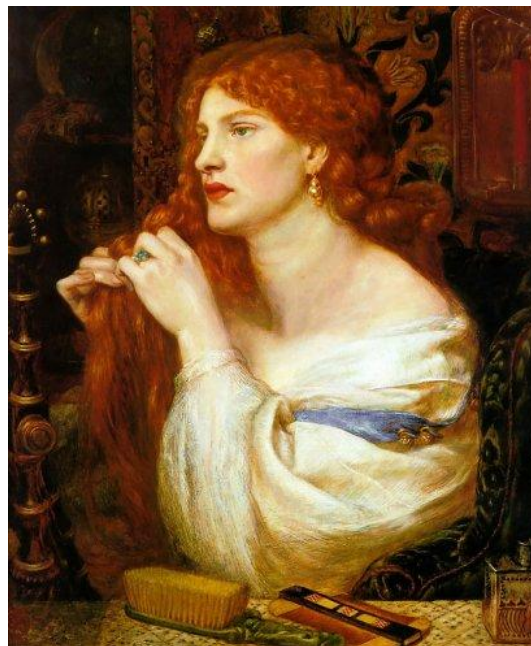


Fig.6. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Fazio's Mistress (Aurelia)* (1863)



Fig. 7. John Everett Millais, *Mariana* (1851)



Fig. 8. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Mariana* (1868-70)



Fig. 9. John Everett Millais *Sophie Grey* (1857)



© The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, UK

Fig. 10. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Elizabeth Siddall* (1854)



Fig.11. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Mrs William Morris (The Blue Silk Dress)* (1868)



Fig. 12. *Burne-Jones and Morris Family* (1874)



## Chapter 2: Fashionable Origins: Sources of Pre-Raphaelite Dress in Painted Works



Fig. 13. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Mrs Morris* (1873)



Fig. 14. Dante Gabriel Rossetti *Sir Lancelot in the Queen's Chambers* (1847)



Fig. 15. Paul Mercuri in Camille Bonnard's *Costumes Historiques*, "Scene de Moers" (1830)

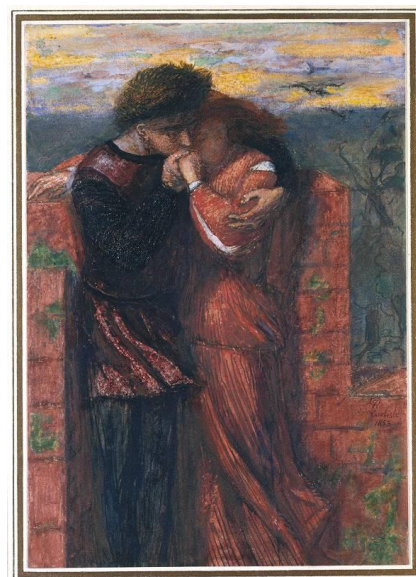


Fig.16. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Carlisle Wall* (1853)



Fig. 17. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Blue Closet* (1857)



Fig. 18. Paul Mercuri in Camille Bonnard's *Costumes Historiques*, "Finaçailles" (1830)



Fig. 19. William Morris, *La belle Iseult* (1861)



Fig. 20. Ford Maddox Brown, *Chaucer at the Court of Edward II* (1845-51)





Fig. 21. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Guinevere* (1848)



Fig. 22. John Everett Millais, *Ophelia* (1851-2)



Fig. 23. John Everett Millais, *Black Brunswicker* (1859-60)



Fig. 24. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Perserpine* (1872)



Fig. 25. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Bower Meadow* (1872)



Fig. 26. John Parson posed by Dante Gabriel, *Mrs William Morris* (1865)



Fig. 27. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Mrs William Morris* (1872)



Fig. 28. John Everett Millais, *Ransom* (1860-62)



### Chapter 3: Fashion Codes: Semiotic Functions of Dress in Pre-Raphaelite Paintings

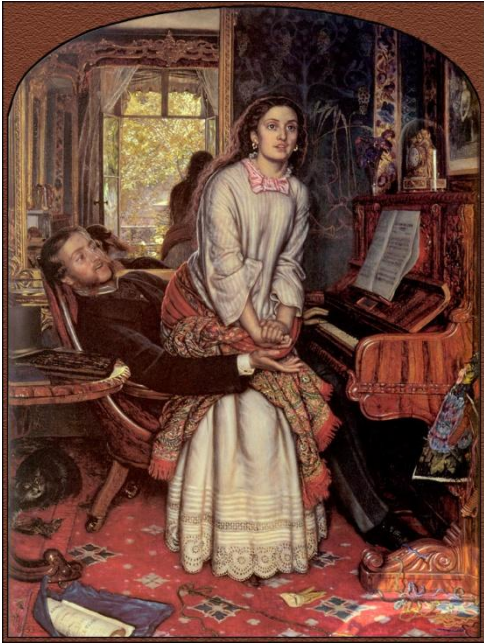


Fig. 29. William Holman Hunt, *Awakening Conscience* (1853)



Fig. 30. William Holman Hunt, *Fanny Holman Hunt* (1866-7)



Fig. 31. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Found* (1854-81)

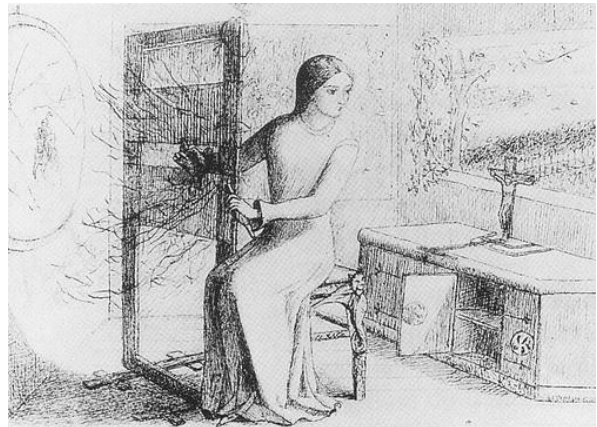


Fig. 32. Elizabeth Siddall, *The Lady of Shallot* (1853)





Fig. 33. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Before the Battle* (1858)



Fig. 34. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Lady Greensleeves* (1859)



Fig. 35. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Beloved* (1865)



Fig. 36. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Roman Widow* (1873)



Fig. 37. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Monna Rosa*  
(1867)



## Chapter 4: The Sartorial Legacy of the Pre-Raphaelites



Fig. 38. Frederic Leighton, *Flaming June* (1895)



Fig. 39. Illustration in Mary Haweis's *Art of Dress* (1878)



Fig. 40. Edward Burne-Jones, *The Mill* (1882)

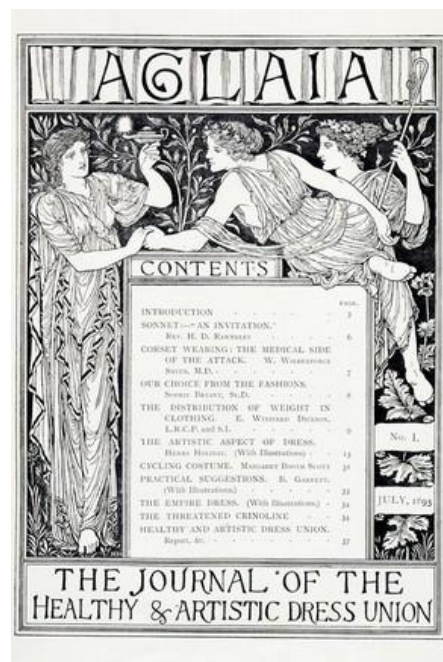


Fig. 41. Artist Unknown, *Aglaia - The Journal of the Healthy & Artistic Dress* (1893)



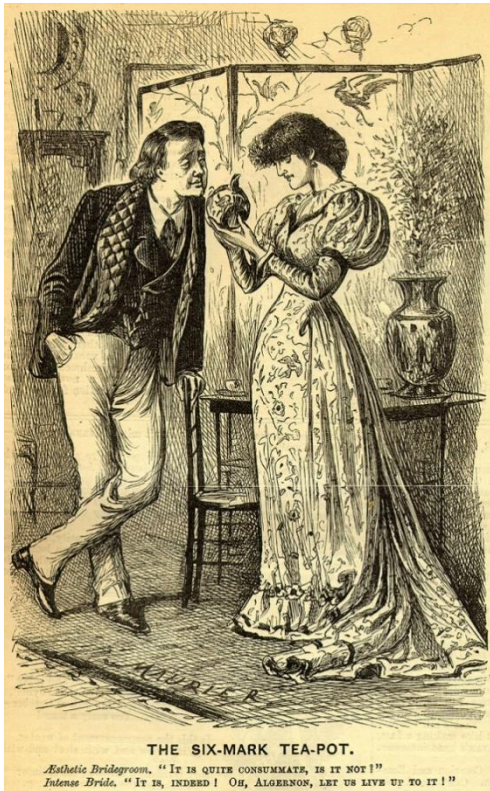


Fig. 42. George Du Maurier, "Six-Mark-Tea-Pot" in *Punch Magazine* (1880)



Fig. 43. British Origin, *Tea-gown* (c. 1885)

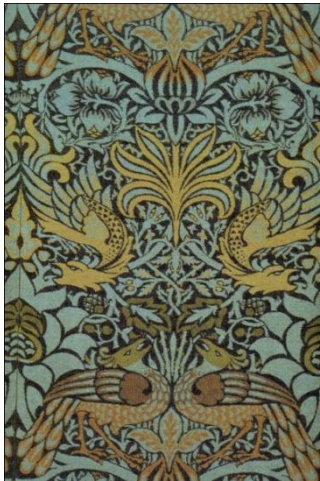


Fig. 44. William Morris, Woven Textile *Peacock and Dragon* (1878)

## Conclusion: Pre-Raphaelite Dress and Authenticity



Fig. 45. Steven Meisel, “Cult of Beauty” in *Vogue* December (2011)



Fig. 46. Steven Meisel, “Cult of Beauty” in *Vogue* December (2011)

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